

The REBEL in me

A ZANLA Guerrilla Commander in the
Rhodesian Bush War, 1975-1980

Agrippah Mutambara



Agrippah Mutambara was born in 1951 in the small mining town of Shurugwi in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. Because of the bottleneck system of education, he could not secure a university place; however, after independence he later obtained a degree in Business Administration. In May 1975 he quit his job as Council Secretary for Neshuro Council in the Mwenezi district and left the country to join the armed struggle. After independence in 1980, he joined the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) where he held various appointments, including Commandant of the Zimbabwe Staff College, Commander of 4 Brigade and later 6 Brigade. On retirement from the army, Brigadier General Mutambara was tasked to start a national service programme before joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has held various ambassadorial posts and is currently

Zimbabwe's ambassador to Mozambique and Swaziland. He is married to Esther (née Gotora) and has five children.

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*To all the comrades who sacrificed their lives for Zimbabwe to be free – you
who shielded me from the enemy's bullets so that I could live to tell my
story, your story, nay our story.*

*To my dear departed parents and all those parents who had to bear and
endure the agony of the sudden disappearance of their sons and daughters,
some never to be seen alive again.*

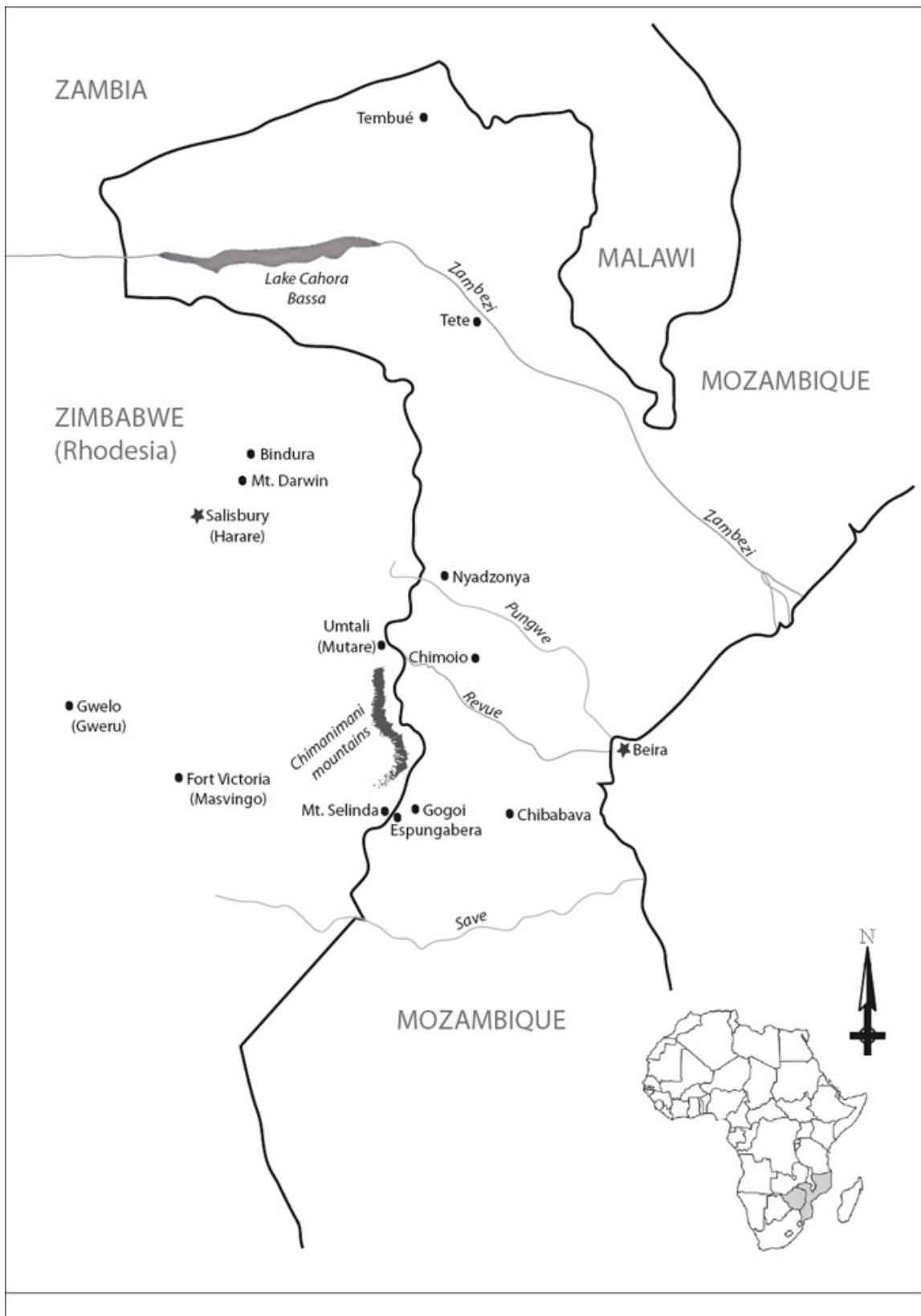
*To my loving wife, Esther, who inspired and encouraged me to share my
experiences and those of other comrades.*

*To Phyllis Johnson, who used her journalistic instincts to improve and
enrich my account.*

*To the wonderful masses of Zimbabwe who, without arms, challenged the
might of a callous colonial regime.*

*To my children and the youths who were too young or unborn to know of the
glorious history of our fight for freedom and independence.*

This book is dedicated to all of you.



Eastern Zimbabwe and Central Mozambique

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In July 1979 all ZANU's chief foreign representatives were recalled to Maputo for an intensive briefing in order to intensify ZANU's diplomatic offensive. President Mugabe is flanked by Vice-President Simon Muzenda on his right and Secretary-General Edgar Tekere on his left. Front row (sitting) from left: Cde J. Chimbande (Tanzania), Cde L. Maziwisa (Romania) and Cde J. Mandebvu (Libya); second row (kneeling) from left: Cde J. Kangai (USA), Cde A. Chidoda (Canada), Cde R. Chivhiya (West Africa) and Cde J. Shoniwa (Sweden); back row (standing) from left: Cde D. Patiripakashata (Ethiopia), Cde F. Shava (UK); Cde Mombeshora (Egypt), Cde S. Makoni (West Germany), Cde Simbarashe (Australia) and Cde M. Chademana (Botswana).

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Introduction

As I followed her into the living room, Mrs Murerwa* called out to her daughters playing in an adjacent room, “Mudiwa, Gamu, Tapiwa, come and meet Uncle Dragon.” Mudiwa, then 13, was the eldest; Gamu (short for Gamuchirai), aged eleven, was the middle child; and Tapiwa, at seven, was the youngest. The children had been told of the visit to their home by Uncle Dragon that afternoon. As they waited in anticipation for their as yet unknown guest to arrive, their active minds began forming a picture of what Uncle Dragon would look like. For Mudiwa and Gamu, their perceptions almost coincided. He would be a hefty, ugly man, aged between forty and fifty. In their logic, ‘uncle’ was synonymous with old age. Tapiwa, because she was so young, had a radically different vision of Uncle Dragon. She had heard from her mother stories about the dragon – the monster that spits fire. To her, Uncle Dragon was that monster. What she could not understand, and hoped to clarify with her mother in due course, was why they should be related to a monster. Even though they did not communicate their thoughts to each other, all the girls were anxious to confirm the accuracy of their secret predictions.

The children were very excited by my arrival. They all raced towards the door leading to the living room. It seemed they were in competition to see who would be the first to know the identity of the dragon – Uncle Dragon. They had subconsciously accepted that winning the race would be determined by whoever went first through the door into the living room. Tapiwa, who was positioned three steps away from the door when the race began, could have easily been the winner. She took two quick steps towards the door, and abruptly stopped; the thought of being the first to confront the dragon and the fear of being consumed by its fire, replacing the desire to win with the instinct for survival. The front-runner had thus collapsed just before crossing the finish line. The race was now hotly contested by Mudiwa and Gamu. Although Gamu was the younger, she had a strong build which compensated for the age advantage the frail looking Mudiwa had. It is difficult to imagine how a race to cover only about ten metres

could have been so ferociously fought. The result was a photo finish. Their two bodies merged into one at the finish line, and their combined width filled the doorframe as they wriggled their way into the living room.

Celebration of their victory was short lived as the search for Uncle Dragon began in earnest. There were only two people in the living room, their mother and a smartly dressed, clean shaven, good looking young man, but there was no Uncle Dragon; not the caricature they had built in their fertile imaginations. Tapiwa finally mastered her fear and cautiously peeped through the door to see if the dragon had devoured her two older sisters. She, like them, was puzzled there was no dragon, but just a charming young man. The three exchanged confused glances. Their mother, not understanding why they had hesitated, urged them, "Come on girls, greet Uncle Dragon." With a look of incredulity Tapiwa quickly retorted, "but he is not a dragon, he is a human being."

I arrived in Addis Ababa, the capital of Socialist Ethiopia, during the second week of July, 1978, about three months after being withdrawn from military operations inside Rhodesia. I had been appointed as the Chief Representative of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) to Socialist Ethiopia by the President of ZANU and Commander in Chief of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe. Apart from forty students training to be pilots or technicians at Ethiopian Airlines, fourteen of them from ZANU and twenty-six from the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the Zimbabwean community in Ethiopia was only a handful. These included the families of Mr Cephas Mangwana, Mr Herbert Murerwa, Mr Gibson Mandishona, Mr Dube, the late Mrs Ethel Binga wa M'tarika (wife of the late President of Malawi), and the late Mr Joboringo Murisi. I had set as one of my priorities visits to the Zimbabwean community based in Addis Ababa. During the last three weeks I had begun with visits to the working spouses at their respective workplaces and was now winding down the first phase of these visits. The second phase involved visiting the families in their homes to afford myself the opportunity to meet the remainder of the family members. Already, I had been to Mr Mangwana's and Mr Mandishona's homes where I was welcomed with much warmth and affection and treated to dinner on each of the two visits. The aura of being a freedom fighter who had been in operations against the Rhodesian regime not more than three months before my arrival in Socialist Ethiopia, heightened the anticipations of all the

family members to meet me. On each of the visits I stayed over five hours and left the homes after midnight. There was so much interest about my time as a guerrilla fighter that I was only excused, in every instance, after promising I would return in the near future to continue recounting my experiences.

Now it was my turn to visit the Murerwa family. I had made prearrangements with Mr Murerwa that today I would visit his home. When I knocked at his office door he invited me to enter and with his characteristic affable exuberance, came to welcome me with a big hug. With him in the office was a charming lady to whom he quickly introduced me, "*Mai Mudiwa, please meet Uncle Dragon.*" Like her husband, she was an engaging and easy to like personality. Within a short space of time the three of us were laughing and joking as if we had known each other a lifetime.

"Uncle Dragon, I have heard so much about you from my husband and I was *dying* to meet you. Our children also are eager to meet you," Mrs Murerwa cheerfully enthused.

"I too have heard so much about you and your three children and I have been looking forward to meeting you," I replied, "your husband is such a nice man who made me feel most welcome from the very first day we met."

"You also are a very sociable and likeable character," Mr Murerwa interjected, "you don't look like someone capable of killing a fly." We all laughed at the implied humor in his words.

After a few more friendly exchanges, Mr Murerwa announced that he was going to finish work a little late and suggested that I precede him to his house in the company of his wife. It was our arrival at their house that precipitated the aforementioned reception by their children.

The earlier apprehensions shown by Mr and Mrs Murerwa's children towards Uncle Dragon were soon replaced by the eager desire to know about the war of liberation and the role that I played in it. As the evening progressed, the family was spellbound by the recounting of my experiences in the liberation struggle. Tapiwa, who had earlier shown such great trepidation about the Dragon, was now seated on the Dragon's lap, unwilling to be separated lest she should miss a word of what Uncle Dragon was saying. It was not until 2 am, long after Tapiwa had fallen asleep on my lap, that I bade the family goodbye promising that I would return to

continue the story of the struggle for Zimbabwe's independence and the role I played in it.

Just as it was relevant then to narrate the history of our liberation struggle to a smaller audience, it is relevant today, even more so, to narrate our history to a wider audience and have it recorded for the sake of posterity. I now invite everyone, especially our youth, to join me in my journey back in time and to share with me some of the experiences I lived through. Along the arduous and tortuous journey to freedom, I shall pause along the way to salute those of our heroes who did not make it to an independent and free Zimbabwe. Deserved praise and tribute shall be showered on all those who took part in the liberation struggle, and special mention shall be made of some of our living heroes and legends who played a pivotal role for the cause of freedom.

You are especially invited to be guests in my body and soul, so that we journey together and see the struggle through the eyes of a guerrilla fighter; experience together the trials and tribulations of being a freedom fighter; the joys of working amongst the masses; and the celebrations and satisfaction of achieving freedom and independence during one's lifetime. By no means will my account be complete. My vision is restricted mostly to ZANLA, the military wing of ZANU, from which I operated and have some first hand knowledge. Cursory references will be made to the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the military wing of ZAPU and the only other organisation that participated in the armed liberation struggle. I shall attempt to give a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics in the search for what proved elusive unity between ZANU and ZAPU and their respective military wings – ZANLA and ZIPRA.

* Ruth Chipo Murerwa is wife to Herbert Muchemwa Murerwa who, at the time, worked for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). A former diplomat, Dr Herbert Murerwa has held numerous Ministerial posts in the government of Zimbabwe, the latest being that of Minister of Lands and Land Resettlement.

Chapter 1

THE REBEL IN ME

I am a rebel. You are a rebel too. Look at it this way, all human beings and all living creatures are rebels. Rebellion may be defined as an act of defiance against, or resistance to, authority or order. Amongst humans, the first visible act of rebellion occurs when a baby is unceremoniously ejected from the warmth and security of a mother's womb and thrust into a harsh and uncertain external environment. With a shriek and the kick and thrust of feet and arms, the baby registers the first act of defiance. To be a rebel is usually perceived in a negative light; especially since those who are the target of defiance most commonly use the word. It is not, however, gospel truth when viewed from the point of view of those that feel unjustly persecuted and give the word the positive twist of a resistance to injustice. In an ideal situation, authority or orders ought to be legal, lawful and justified. But cases abound where, in fact, none of these criteria are met. One could argue that if the authority or order is not legal, lawful and justified, then the rebellion against such authority or order acquires the de facto stamp of legality, lawfulness and justice. The Rhodesian regime, in the context of the laws it had inherited from Britain, became illegal when it announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on 11 November 1965. By this act, the regime was rebelling against the colonial authority, Britain, that for years it represented.

The justification or lack of it for a rebellion depends on which side of the moral equation one belongs. Rebellion may take various forms, including passive resistance, helpless submission, open but peaceful defiance and, in extreme cases, violent resistance. In the case of Rhodesia, all these different forms came into play.

I was born into a Christian family and, in my youth, I regularly attended Sunday church services for children. As I grew up I continued the tradition of going to church. The preachers in most of their sermons would exhort their flock to be meek and to endure with humility the poverty and

hardships on earth, for ‘your kingdom is in heaven’.* It is against God’s will, they emphasised, to seek retribution against your enemies. When your enemy strikes you on one cheek, instead of striking back, you should give him another cheek to strike; a convenient justification for maintaining the subservience of Rhodesia’s black people. Outside the Church, the doctrine of humility, subservience and forgiveness was observed in our own home. Almost every evening after supper the family was fed on a diet of Christian teachings. My late parents used to alternate reading and expounding verses from the Holy Bible. We were made to memorise those verses they deemed illustrative and significant to the message they wanted to impart to their children. To this day I can recite scores of verses from the Holy Bible that were imprinted in my mind decades ago. Every child in the family knew exactly which among all the verses was the most revered by either our father or our mother – the verse that would be inscribed on their respective tombstones when they died. When my father died eight years after the attainment of our independence, we inscribed on his tombstone his favourite verse – Psalms 23 Vs 4.* In fact, we went beyond that. Beneath his favourite verse and on the same tombstone, we inscribed my mother’s favourite verse – Galatians 6 Vs 9.† It is not customary to do this during the lifetime of the person to whom the inscription relates. But we did so to honor a pledge they publicly declared while attending my wedding ceremony, and recorded on video, that irrespective of who died first, they wanted to be buried in the same grave. When my mother’s journey on earth came to an end eighteen years later, we laid her body side by side, in the same grave, with the remains of her beloved husband, our adored father. Not even death could separate them. As we laid the remains of our mother by the side of her husband in fulfilment of their declared wish, we prayed to God Almighty that her spirit be joyfully reunited with that of her husband in eternal peace in God’s heavenly kingdom.

My father was a medical orderly. When he was on day duty he would leave for work at 7.30 am. At 10 am he would return from the hospital to have breakfast and would have with him a newspaper tucked under his arm or rolled and held in his hand. The rest of the family had adjusted its timeline for having breakfast to coincide with Dad’s preferred time.

A normal working day in the life of my mother began around 5 am when most housewives were asleep and the inadequacy of natural light restricted the chores she could engage in during the first one to one and half morning

hours. By the time my father left for work, a five-minute walk from our house, my mother would have finished tidying the house and the yard surrounding it. Mom had a reputation of being extremely smart and organised. If Dad had wanted to have his breakfast earlier in the morning, Mom had lots of time to spare and would not have had problems providing the breakfast even as early as 6.30 am.

Except in rainy weather, breakfast was always served on the veranda that faced the east. The veranda enabled us to appreciate the scenic beauty that spread before and beyond our eyes. There were the rolling grasslands with scattered trees that ultimately fell into the valley about two kilometres from our house. The grasslands then rose again from the other side of the valley and in splendid undulations rolled into the distance, finally melting and disappearing into the mountain ranges far beyond.

We would take our breakfast seated on the floor of the veranda where we would be bathed by the warm sunshine that climbed above the distant mountain ranges. No chairs were provided and the warmth from the sun, absorbed by the concrete floor of the veranda, would radiate back into us, producing a warm and pleasant sensation.

While donning the cloak of Christian purity, my father was also a rebel. My mother was a rebel too. Dad, with his feet resting on the steps leading to the veranda would, between sips of hot tea, read to Mom pre-selected news clips from the Rhodesia Herald. Mostly, these snippets highlighted the humiliation that blacks suffered at the hands of the whites and the white government. There were stories about dogs being unleashed against university students peacefully demonstrating for an improvement to the squalid conditions under which they lived. There were stories of black Africans who had been arrested and detained for trespassing into a ‘whites only’ restaurant or swimming pool. Then, of course, there were occasions when my father would read about new laws that further dispossessed blacks of their land and placed it in the hands of the whites, mostly of British descent. Black Africans were moved, in many cases, to unproductive and often more remote land, to which they did not have title. Such land was designated as Tribal Trust Lands. In other words, the land was merely entrusted to the blacks and they could be moved and removed at the behest of the white controlled local administrations. Because of my youth, I missed much of the significance of these early legislative changes that caused much sorrow and hardship among blacks.

But each day, it seemed, brought new and disturbing revelations about the mistreatment of blacks. Mom and Dad would share and openly express between themselves their disgust and revulsion at these various acts of humiliation. Sometimes I would idly reflect that the attitudes Mom and Dad displayed at these ‘morning tea-time briefings’ seemed to contradict their teachings of ‘turning the other cheek.’

Mom and Dad did not realise then that as they diagnosed and digested disparaging remarks about blacks from the newspapers, they were in fact sowing seeds of rebellion. And, ‘some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places; where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’* My parents are thus my first heroes. It is they who gave birth to the rebel in me.

At age 16 I was attending boarding school and during holidays I would go home to be with my parents. I went to the same places I had been to before and saw the exact things I had seen before, but they now looked different. Not because they had changed, but because I had changed.

One early morning during one such holiday, my Mom sent me to buy meat from her favorite butchery in Bindura town. I used the same route I always used. The road went past Bindura School, situated to the right. Some Europeans were driving into the schoolyard to drop off their children, while others who had arrived earlier were driving out of the school gate after leaving their children. Some black chaperones were escorting, on foot, a few white children to school. I had witnessed this routine many times before and had seen nothing abnormal about it. On this occasion, however, I began questioning myself as to why there should be no black children studying at this school, and no black teachers either.

I was still brooding over the supremacist arrogance of the whites when I was confronted by further confirmation of that arrogance. Ahead of me, on the left side just about half a kilometre away from the town centre, there was a swimming pool located inside a six-foot high perimeter wall. From outside it was not possible to see the pool or the bar and restaurant that the wall kept hidden from ‘unauthorised’ eyes. On the wall next to the entrance was a big black board with large and brightly contrasting white letters,

'WHITES ONLY – Trespassers will be prosecuted'. The last words were written in small print. The black man who stood guard at the entrance was a superfluous presence as no black could dare challenge the writing on the wall.

By the time I got to the butchery, I had worked myself into a cold fury. It was as if, up to now, I had been blind to the injustices perpetrated against the black people and suddenly my vision had been restored and I could now see the depth and ugliness of white supremacy, every minute detail of it, as if through a magnifying glass. The seeds my parents had sown had inadvertently fallen on good soil and were beginning to germinate.

As I entered the butchery the squeaking sound of the door caused the six white customers to look in my direction. Surprised by what they saw, they exchanged quizzical glances before turning their questioning faces towards the butcher. He had been busy punching figures on the till, but looked up in time to register the appeals of his (white) customers and, at the same time, to see me moving towards his counter. The customers' eyes moved back and forth between the butcher and the *black apparition*, inviting the butcher to take action.

I ignored the quizzical glances and reached the counter. The butcher demanded, “what do you think you are doing you *kaffir*,* coming in like this?”

“I am not a *kaffir*,” I countered, “and I want to buy some meat.”

“Get out of this place now! *Kaffirs* are served from outside through the window. Can’t you see the others queuing outside?”

The window alluded to was an opening in the wall through which blacks were served, but only after all white customers had been served. While blacks could buy any kind of meat, generally they could only afford the sort sold to whites to feed their dogs. Queuing patiently outside for their turn to be served were between 12 and 18 black customers.

“I said get out now or I will call the police.” The butcher was now getting visibly agitated. I was not intimidated and stood my ground. Though outwardly I remained calm and composed, inwardly I was seething with anger.

I was no stranger to the expected protocol at this butchery, which favoured whites before blacks. However, something had changed in me and I was determined to defy the status quo. The butcher started punching numbers, this time not on the till but on the telephone. The voice on the

other end of the line was faint but clear from where I stood. “Bindura Police Station, can I help you?” The butcher quickly identified himself and his present location and in an agitated voice proceeded to report, “Please, this is urgent. A black man is causing a commotion in my butchery. It seems he is armed and I fear for the safety of my (white) customers.” The response from the other end was immediate and expected. “We are sending a Quick Reaction Squad right away. They should be there in about five to ten minutes.” They did not bother to get the identity of the black man or a description of what he could be armed with.

Seven minutes from the time the call was made and a hundred metres away from the ‘crime scene’, the Quick Reaction Squad comprising ten heavily armed policemen sped past me on its way to the butchery. I was going in the opposite direction. I watched the drama unfold from a safe distance as the policemen assaulted innocent bystanders and a few of the (black) customers before shoving five ‘suspects’ into the police truck and taking them to the police station for questioning. The butcher could not identify the black man who was causing a commotion because ‘they all look alike.’

Now I was grown up and was no longer a passive listener as my father continued the tradition of reading selected news clips to my mother. The influence of my parents and my association with other students, who abhorred the segregated system of government and its treatment of blacks, radicalised my views regarding the racial inequalities so pervasive in our society. Whenever I listened to my father expressing his views, I now could discern beneath the veneer of Christian purity the rumble of a deep hatred towards white supremacist attitudes. I became convinced that there was heredity in the manner my father’s emotions were affected and expressed.

As far as I knew, my father’s career began in Selukwe (now Shurugwi) where he worked as a medical orderly at a clinic called Sebanga. Except for the first and last-born of his 10 children, all the others were born there. When my father was transferred from Selukwe in 1960 his clinic that specialised in the treatment of venereal diseases (VD) and tuberculosis (TB) was closed. In its place a village was built and named after him (Mutambara Village), in honor of his lengthy and faithful service at this clinic and to the surrounding community.

I later learned that in fact my father had begun his working life as a teacher at Morgenster, a mission school in Fort Victoria (now Masvingo).

While teaching there his young brother, called Taruvinga, was also studying at the same school. One day Taruvinga was involved in some indiscipline and was expelled from the school, without the knowledge of his elder brother. When the news reached my father, he was incensed that the white principal could expel his brother without the courtesy of informing him first, a member of staff at the same school. Mr Mutambara sought an appointment with the principal to get clarification, but the request was denied. The rebel in my father took charge of his emotions and his actions. He went to the principal's house, but the principal, who had sensed danger, had locked himself in. Dad could not be stopped. He went to the back of the house and gained entry by breaking a window. The principal, on seeing my father's forced entry into his house, unlocked the main door and bolted out. Other black members of staff, who had correctly interpreted Mr Mutambara's state of mind and had been following him, were able to subdue him before he could commit a crime that might have cost him his life. For daring to challenge the white man, Mr Mutambara was summarily dismissed from the school and blacklisted from the teaching profession.

The rebel in me is hereditary too. In 1961 at the age of ten I enrolled at Charles Wraith Government School in Selukwe town to do my Standard 1 (Grade 3 equivalent). It was accepted tradition amongst school children that, during the first three to four months, the already established students would mistreat newcomers to varying degrees. In my case my tormentor was a boy in my class, called Alfred, who was about my age but taller and leaner. Each morning before classes began, or during lunch hour, he would deride me, especially when there were girls around. "Young boy" he usually began, "go and fetch me some water to drink." Using the cup I always carried with me from home I would rush to the tap to get him some water. On my return he would make a show of inspecting my cup before throwing its contents into my face.

"Stupid boy, how dare you give me water in a dirty cup!" He would feign anger to the merriment of the other children.

For two months the pattern of abuse continued. Alfred would ask me to walk on all fours and bark like a dog. Sometimes I would be asked to 'mate a locust and produce children'. The obscene things I was expected to perform ranged from ludicrous to perverted. One day he called me to a room where he was bragging about himself before four girls and two boys. As I entered, his air of superiority reached new heights. With an

exaggerated cough he ordered, “Young boy, remove all your clothes and masturbate.”

“What?” I asked incredulously.

“You heard what I said. Just do it.”

“No I won’t!”

“Yes you will!”

“I said, NO, I won’t,” I responded.

My firm and decisive refusal took him aback. The hereditary rebel in me had been awakened. Like my father at the mission school, I saw the order as an affront to my dignity and it could not go unchallenged.

“You filthy little boy, your father failed to discipline you. I shall do the task for him today,” he sneered.

“Say another bad word against my father and I will rip you apart like a rag.” My bravado took everyone, including myself, by surprise.

The die had been cast. Every child at school knew that any challenge proffered and accepted at school was never settled at the school. An abattoir about two kilometres from school was the venue where challenges were resolved at the end of the school day.

By the time Alfred and I arrived there, a gathering of over twenty school children was already waiting to witness the duel. Two tiny earth heaps; one representing the *mamma* of Alfred’s mother and the other my mother’s *mamma* had already been mounded. To destroy the *mamma* of your adversary’s mother was a declaration of war. For the adversary to reciprocate the gesture became the trigger that sparked off the war.

Exuding great confidence, Alfred wasted no time destroying my mother’s *mamma*, much to the delight of the onlookers. I responded immediately in kind. I had underestimated the speed with which Alfred would react to my action. His fist caught me squarely on my face and sent me sprawling to the ground with my nose bleeding. I tried to quickly get up, but again another fist sent me back to the ground. Stars twinkled in my eyes and the roar of amused laughter from the spectators agonisingly filled my ears. Alfred saw the opportunity to finish me off. His right foot swung at lighting speed towards my face. My reflexes were good. I caught his ankle just before his foot could connect with its target and pulled it hard towards me, causing his body to come tumbling down to the ground. We got up at the same time and started trading punches. His punches were hard and painful. On a few occasions I thought I could not stand the pain any more and wanted to give

up the fight. Somehow I managed to convince myself to resist a little longer. Finally I decided enough was enough and opened my mouth to declare my surrender. To my utter surprise, Alfred turned away from me at this precise moment, leaped over a thorny shrub, and started running away in pain. The words of surrender that had started forming in my mouth were quickly substituted for taunts as I pursued my adversary with renewed vigor and challenged the coward to stop and fight. From this day onwards, the tables were turned. I became a local hero and Alfred became my whipping boy.

As I grew up, so did the rebel in me. I became more and more intolerant of white supremacist attitudes. In 1969 I completed my GCE 'O' Level, but could not get a place to do 'A' Level studies, even though my grades were good. The system of education ensured that only a fraction of black children would get the opportunity to progress to 'A' Level, and even fewer to university.

In 1970 I was employed as a laboratory assistant at Mazoe Gold Mine, and later the same year I went to do the same job at Cam and Motor Mine in Gatooma (now Kadoma). We were 13 laboratory assistants at this mine, working day and night shifts under the supervision of a German laboratory technician named Schubert. This white man was a real racist and would unnecessarily blow his top at every minor or perceived mistake. Our work was critical to the control of the mining processes, but morale amongst all the laboratory assistants sank to its lowest ebb because of the aggressive and racist attitude of Mr Schubert.

One day in 1971 all laboratory assistants resolved to go on strike to demand the immediate dismissal of Mr Schubert. A crisis situation developed at the mine because of the leverage our laboratory analyses had over the production process. Intensive negotiations to persuade us to resume work were conducted between the mine authorities and ourselves. We stood our ground as our singular condition for ending the strike action remained unambiguously clear – Mr Schubert had to be fired. Neither side wanted to budge. We even refused the offer of having our salaries doubled in return for ending the strike. The authorities then decided to restrict our movements to our places of residence, which were co-located, and police guards were deployed 24 hours a day to ensure we did not break the restriction. I was one of three members of our team chosen to negotiate with the mine authorities and I gained the reputation of being the unyielding extremist in

the group. Afterwards, the negotiating tactics were changed and each of us was interviewed separately.

After two weeks of intense but failed negotiations, the authorities at the mine decided to terminate our contracts and we were given only 24 hours to pack and leave the mine premises. We were told that none of us would be allowed to come to the mine or to seek re-employment. All along we had known that ‘blood is thicker than water.’

Later it came to light that during the failed separate negotiations, three members of our group had capitulated and agreed that they would continue to work under the German technician. When we left the mine, the three capitulators returned the following day and became the nucleus for training new recruits to replace all those fired.

The lessons from this experience repeated themselves at various stages in my life. I am alluding to lessons regarding one’s commitment to a cause and its principles. No matter how noble and just the cause or principles, there are those who for some ‘dirty pieces of silver’, or merely for the purpose of ingratiating themselves with superior authority or a perceived superior race, are willing and ready to sacrifice their just cause and lofty principles for the sake of expediency. The struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe is replete with such traitors and quislings.

A few months after leaving Cam and Motor Mine I got a place to train as a Council Secretary/Treasurer (Local Government Officer) at Domboshawa Training Centre. On completion of my course I had a number of in-service attachments before finally being appointed Executive Secretary for Neshuro African Council. The position of Council Secretary carried with it lots of responsibilities and commanded a lot of respect, especially during those early years of African Councils, administered under the African Council’s Act.

One day I was returning from Fort Victoria, the provincial capital of Victoria province, after a banking errand. I was driving a small Mazda 1000 pick-up truck that I had bought six months earlier. My nephew, aged six years, who I had taken to spend a month with me, accompanied me. Forty kilometres from Fort Victoria my nephew was complaining of hunger, causing me to branch off at a shop called Butt to buy him food. A white lady was serving customers and at the same time engaging in a conversation with her hefty white boyfriend, who was a policeman. I bought a plate of rice and stew and gave it to my nephew to eat. I took a spoonful to taste and

found the food had little salt and was badly prepared. I complained to the white lady that the food was not good. The policeman, wanting to show off to his girlfriend, told me to ‘fuck off’.

“I’m not talking to you,” I retorted sharply.

One should never insult a man in front of his girlfriend. I learned the lesson too late. With surprising agility the giant policeman scooped me from the ground and dangled me in the air. With his huge arms encircling my waist he tried to squeeze the breath out of my body. I began throwing punches at his face. Staggering from the weight of my body and the blows to his face, he managed to carry me as far as the door and, breathing heavily, dropped me to the ground and ordered me to leave. Satisfied with the punishment I had inflicted, I took my nephew and drove off to Neshuro.

I spent most of my vacations with my parents in Bindura. One day, on such an occasion, I drove my Mazda 1000 pick-up truck to a white-owned farm called Geneva to buy oranges. The farm is located about six and a half kilometres from Bindura town. I did not know then that 27 years on, the farm, renamed Sangere Farm, would belong to me as one of the beneficiaries of the government’s land redistribution programme. This programme would become immensely popular amongst the majority black population, and abhorred and fiercely contested by the white minority farmers whose land was appropriated. The oranges I bought were for resale at the hospital’s vegetable and fruit market. The market place was founded by my mother around 1967 and was nothing more than a vacant piece of ground positioned immediately after entering the hospital premises. The main attraction of this location was that it was by the side of the only entrance/exit to the hospital, and there were three large trees that provided shade to the vendors seated beneath. Neither patients nor visitors could escape its beckoning presence. My mother started as the only vendor, but when it became apparent to other members of the hospital staff that she was making reasonable profit from the sale of her merchandise, about five other vendors soon joined her.

The fruits and vegetables were displayed on top of sacks or cardboard spread on the ground. Some vegetables were tied into small bundles and their stems partially submerged in water dishes to keep them fresh. The vendors would be seated on the same materials as carried their merchandise. During school holidays I usually substituted for my mother in selling the family merchandise. Youths of my age generally found it

demeaning to sit on the dirty ground selling vegetables and fruits and, most of the time, rejected their parents' demands to do so. On numerous occasions, my competing vendors were old women. Rather than being demeaned, I felt a sense of pride that I was able to be of some use to my parents. This sense of responsibility was born out of an appreciation that my father's meagre salary was inadequate for my parents to be able to raise our large family to a decent level of education, while also maintaining a reasonable standard of living. Because of this consciousness, a result of eavesdropping on my parents, whenever I was on school holidays I spent a lot of my time vending perishables at the hospital market. My mother, gratefully excused from this responsibility, instead of taking it as an opportunity to rest would scavenge for bones and copper wire for resale. Through her efforts, the revenue she brought into the family in a month would usually surpass my father's salary.

Even after I began working as a Council Secretary/Treasurer I would spend my vacations helping my parents. The dignity of labour my parents had taught me to appreciate from my youth had not deserted me in my adulthood. By now my parents' responsibilities towards their family had been greatly reduced because some of their children were already married and others, like me, were gainfully employed and able to supplement their incomes.

One evening in December 1974 I went to spend some time with my father who was on night duty at Bindura hospital. He informed me that a special patient had been admitted to hospital that day, a guerrilla fighter named Cuthbert who had been captured in operations in the northeastern part of the country. Due to serious wounds to both legs, Cuthbert had one leg amputated just above the knee and was placed in a private ward. The first few days after the amputation, security around Cuthbert was lax. Those few days gave me the opportunity to surreptitiously speak to him. Despite the excruciating pain he was suffering, Cuthbert exhibited great courage. He spoke of the commitment he and other comrades had made for the cause of liberation. Even though he knew that he might be tortured or even killed, Cuthbert vowed that he would never betray the cause for freedom and was prepared to face the ultimate penalty without betraying his comrades.

During the past two years it had become evident that the war of liberation had intensified in the northeastern part of the country. Periodically there was increased movement of army trucks, military planes and helicopters

going in the direction of Mt Darwin. Because of the secrecy shrouding Rhodesian operations against guerrillas, people began to speculate and even exaggerate the losses of the Rhodesian forces against *vakomana* (the boys), an affectionate reference to the guerrillas. But confirmation that the war was taking a toll on the regime was evidenced by the counter measures the Rhodesian government took against the rural black population, blaming them for being sympathetic and for giving material support to the guerrillas. Many communities in areas where guerrillas operated, or were suspected of operating, were moved into concentration camps called ‘protected villages.’ By the time I left to join the armed struggle, the community where my parents lived had been uprooted from their homes and placed into one of these camps.

These ‘villages’ measured about four square kilometres and could accommodate around five thousand people. The perimeter of the ‘protected villages’ enclosure had a wall of raised earth and on top of the wall were positioned observation posts, manned 24 hours a day by armed guards. A width of about fifty metres was cleared all around the perimeter on the outside to ensure nothing attempting to come in or go out would be missed. Also on top of the wall were flood lights pointing out which made the area just outside the perimeter seem like day during the night. There was only one entrance/exit that was open for the public between 8 am and 5 pm. During these hours, people could leave the village to go and cultivate their fields, attend to their livestock, or to wash their clothes. Anyone who went through the gate was thoroughly searched to ensure no one would carry food for the ‘boys’ (terrorists, according to the regime). Special identification cards were issued to the village residents to ensure that only those authorised to live there could enter.

Despite all these measures, the people were still able to feed the comrades. My mother told me how she would cook food for the ‘boys,’ cover the food and put it underneath a wash basket. On top of the wash basket she put dirty clothes for washing. She created a rapport with the guards so that they did not bother to search her thoroughly. Once outside the village she and other sympathisers knew where and how to communicate with the comrades. There were also instances when the guerrillas were able to infiltrate the ‘protected villages’.

When Cuthbert’s wounds began to heal he was placed under 24-hour guard and interrogations began. I was told that during interrogation the

bandages covering the stump of his leg were unwound and the leg was beaten with a baton until blood gushed out. The torture would continue until he lost consciousness. Treatment was administered and as soon as his condition improved, the process of torture would resume. When it was concluded that Cuthbert would never cooperate, despite all the pressures, he was moved to prison and later was executed. Cuthbert died, but not the cause for which he had sacrificed his life.

In narrating some of the twists and turns in my life the intention is not to make a hero of myself or to suggest that my actions of resistance or rebellion were greater than those of others. Rather, I am seeking to show the rebel identity in me – the propelling force that led me to the decision to leave the relatively comfortable life that I led for an uncertain and unknown future in the wilderness.

* Quotation from the Holy Bible, Matthew Chapter 5 Verse 3.

* The Holy Bible, New International Version, Revised 2002, Publisher Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530, USA. ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.’

† Ibid. ‘Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’

* Ibid. *St. Matthew* 13 v 4–8.

* A pejorative name for black Africans, equivalent to nigger in American parlance, but deriving from Arabic in which language it means “unbeliever”.

Chapter 2

ADIOS RHODESIA

The few words of courage and conviction that Cuthbert spoke from his hospital bed became the anchor upon which my own courage and conviction was founded and secured. The painful torture inflicted, and the mock justice that made him a sacrificial lamb for the armed liberation struggle, in my eyes turned him into a martyr and won him a recruit for the struggle.

My vacation in December 1974 was a momentous occasion that proved to be the turning point in my life, and an occasion that cemented the rebel character in me.

It began with my first and fortuitous encounter with a ZANLA guerrilla, Cuthbert. Following this encounter, it became a matter of when, rather than if, I would desert to join the armed struggle.

A few days before my vacation was due to end I drove my car in a northeasterly direction, past a small town called Mt Darwin situated about 70 kilometres from Bindura, towards an unknown destination. In my secret conversations with Cuthbert, the possibility of a chance encounter with comrades operating about 20 to 30 kilometres to the northeast of Mt Darwin in the Chawanda area had been raised. My intention was to cover this distance in my car, dump it somewhere, then blend with the forest in the hope of such a meeting. If I did not come across any comrades, I would continue walking through the bush in the direction of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique).

Luck was not on my side. After driving for about 15 kilometres from Mt Darwin I came upon a road block jointly manned by soldiers and armed policemen. With guns pointed, they signaled me to stop as if, potentially, I was an armed and dangerous criminal or a ‘terrorist’. Suspicion and wariness were vividly written on their faces.

It took an hour of interrogation for them to swallow my lie that the purpose of my trip, through what they termed an ‘operational area,’ was to

look for a relative from whom I had been parted for many years. Before accepting my story, my car and body had been thoroughly searched and given the all clear. Despite this, I was escorted all the way back to Bindura where my car was impounded and I was told contact would be made with me later to come and reclaim it. No such contact ever materialised and, in fact, after independence I had a chance encounter with the car being driven by someone unknown to me. I never bothered to find out who the new illegal owner was.

Neshuro Council is situated in Masvingo province, whose provincial capital bears the same name. Before independence in 1980 the province was called Victoria and the town was known as Fort Victoria. The council is situated in the district of Mwenezi, formerly Nuanetsi.

There was nothing unusual about my fortnightly trips to Fort Victoria. Neshuro Council, named after the local chief, was one of the newest and least developed African Councils. It had a number of growth points, the main one being where the council offices were located. Except for retail shops, butcheries, grinding mills, and bottle stores, the whole council area lacked modern amenities such as banks, theatres, cinemas, libraries, and post offices. Situated about 120 kilometres from Neshuro Council, Fort Victoria was, and still remains, the nearest center where council residents can access the aforementioned amenities.

One clear Saturday morning I hitched a ride to Fort Victoria. I carried with me a briefcase, slightly larger than the standard briefcases. The reason for carrying it was because I used my weekend trips to go and deposit the quite considerable council revenue collected during week days. But on this particular occasion the contents were not the usual cash deposits. I had packed in my briefcase four pairs of trousers, four shirts, five underpants, five pairs of stockings, one tooth brush and toothpaste, the Holy Bible, a novel, and a school exercise book whose cover had a map of Rhodesia that extended to parts of western Portuguese East Africa, bordering Rhodesia.

I arrived in Fort Victoria and found the banks had closed ten minutes previously. This was a severe setback since I had planned to withdraw some cash from my personal account to fulfil an important assignment. The only money I had on me was a paltry twenty dollars, too little for the commitment I had set for myself. I decided to borrow at least fifty dollars from one of my friends.

I met Femias Chakabuda in 1966 when I enrolled for my secondary education at Mzingwane Secondary School, about 42 kilometres south east of Bulawayo, the second largest city in Rhodesia. From Form 1 up to Form 4 we shared the same classrooms, stayed in the same dormitories and were inseparable friends. After completing GCE 'O' Level, both of us failed to secure places for 'A' Level and took different professional routes. When Neshuro Council employed me, Femias was a self-employed bookkeeper in Fort Victoria. We thus had numerous opportunities to meet and renew our old friendship. It was only years after independence that our relationship tapered off, due to divergent political views.

Femias was just leaving his flat for the Farayi Beer hall, when I arrived. Maybe that was just the environment I needed to share my thoughts with my friend. I wondered whether I should reveal my plans to him. After all, good friends are supposed to confide in each other. We were drinking from the same two litre mug of opaque beer he had bought when I came to the conclusion that the stakes were too high and I should not reveal my plans even to my closest friend. We were on our third mug when I casually enquired whether he could afford to lend me fifty dollars in exchange for a cheque that he could cash from the bank on Monday. He responded, I believe truthfully, that all he had on him was a little less than ten dollars and he offered that to me. I didn't want to betray the desperation I was feeling, so I politely thanked my friend for his preparedness to help, but declined his offer as it would not satisfy my immediate requirements.

This should have derailed my plans, at least for a time. However, the rebel in me and the beer that I had been gulping brought renewed confidence that I could still achieve great things with meagre resources. That settled, I resolved that today, 24 May 1975 was the day to embark on my secret mission into Portuguese East Africa to join the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe. In the appendices is a diary entry by my late father, in his own handwriting, that confirms the date of my disappearance. Nobody, including my parents or any member of the family, or even my best friend, knew of the momentous decision I had taken.

The choice of Saturday as D-Day was not fortuitous; it was deliberate and well thought out. No one expected me back in my office on Saturday or Sunday. That gave me a two day head start. Early on Monday my absence could be interpreted as just a delay. As the day wore on, my clerk would be a little concerned, not so much by the fact that I had not turned up, but

because I hadn't phoned. On a few occasions in the past I failed to turn up for work on Monday, but in every instance I phoned to explain the reason for the delay and to confirm when I would be back in the office. Tuesday without contact would certainly set alarm bells ringing and, I guessed, the first report would be made to the police about my disappearance. If everything went according to plan, I should have crossed the border by then.

It took me four and a half days to reach the border with Mozambique. Those days had been a harrowing experience that taxed my resolve to the limit. On more than one occasion I thought of aborting the journey, but the rebel in me would not let me surrender, not at this critical juncture.

After bidding farewell to Femias and promising to see him again in the next fortnight, I boarded a bus – not to Neshuro, but heading in a south easterly direction past Chiredzi, a small town situated in the famous sugar estates, and on to lower Sabi valley. The map at the back of the exercise book I had taken with me was my constant companion as I used it to chart the route to the border with Portuguese East Africa. I had made a random decision that my entry point would be Espungabera, which appeared to be a small town in Portuguese East Africa very close to the border with Rhodesia. If anyone was inquisitive about my destination before I crossed the border, my response would be that I was going to Mt Selinda, a settlement directly opposite Espungabera, but on the Rhodesian side.

I alighted just before crossing Sabi Bridge. After paying the bus fare, I only had twelve dollars left in my pocket to begin my new life. The criminal instinct that is inherent in every human being from birth began to haunt and torment me.

I recall when I was six years old and went into our dining room alone; on top of the cupboard inviting my attention was a basin of sugar. Usually, Mom locked the sugar basin in the cupboard. On this fateful day not only did she forget to lock up the basin, she also left the keys dangling on the cupboard door. My eyes roamed around the room to confirm that I was really alone. The natural criminal instinct was warning me that what I was about to do was wrong. I ignored the warning and with a deftness of fingers I never knew I possessed I took a pinch of sugar and thrust it into my mouth. Hmm... it tasted sweet but was too little for me to appreciate the full sweetness of the sugar. Even though I knew I was alone in the room, the criminal instinct reminded me to re-confirm the fact. Again I scanned the

room. Satisfied, my right hand lifted the sugar basin and speedily emptied a quarter of its contents into the palm of my left hand. Like a puppy licking milk from a bowl, my tongue began furiously licking until every granule of sugar was gone. I decided it was time to leave, but the criminal voice inside me urged that I take some more for the last time, just a little bit more of the sugar. After all, if the theft was discovered, no one would suspect I was the culprit. The urging continued until I had the last bit of sugar from the basin in the palm of my hand. At that precise moment the door flung open and my Mom, a whip in hand, burst into the room.

Unknown to me, my sister – Esther – had seen me enter the dining room. When I remained for too long inside she became suspicious and peeped through the keyhole. Excited about her discovery she dashed to alert Mom about the pilfering

As soon as I stepped out of the bus I began to feel like a criminal. I looked all around me for evidence of the presence of members of the Rhodesian security services – soldiers, policemen, members of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and other non-uniformed forces. Lord have mercy! How could I distinguish an ordinary civilian from members of the non-uniformed forces? I felt a cold shiver down my spine. Any civilian who cast his or her eyes on me for an elongated second was a suspect.

Across the bridge was a township and two policemen were coming in my direction. My heart skipped a beat. I thought of turning away from them and increasing the distance between them and me. If they increased their pace to narrow the distance, then I would know they were after me and I would run away as fast as I could. Just then, without paying any attention to me, the policemen went into a nearby shop.

Why on earth was I behaving like a criminal? I had done no criminal act and I could abort my journey and go back to my work without raising suspicion of my intentions. Besides, who could tell what was on my mind? No one! The rebel in me silently responded to my thoughts; thoughts that took me back to when I was young and I thought no one would suspect I had stolen sugar. As on that occasion, I refused to yield.

It was getting dusk and soon darkness would envelop the sky. Before it got too dark, I referred to my ‘companion’ to determine my position in relation to my intended destination. I then mapped out my strategy for achieving my goal. If overcome by fatigue, I would avoid seeking shelter in villages or homes, but sleep close to the homes for fear of wild animals.

Main roads and population centers were to be avoided even during the day, unless I wanted to buy some food. Twice only during my four and half days in the wilderness did I leave the protective shelter of the forest to buy some food from local shops. In the mornings I had to wake up before dawn to avoid arousing suspicion if people noticed the conditions under which I slept.

Lights and fires helped me determine the location of homes at night and the barking of dogs warned me that I was encroaching too close to those homes. The terrain through which I travelled had dotted trees and short but stubborn grass. The progress I had hoped to achieve was frustrated by the grass that seemed to wind itself around my ankles and fasten them to the ground. I was not happy with the progress I was making, especially during the evenings. I would retire to sleep when most lights had been extinguished and the fires had died down. In homes where there were no dogs, I would be surprised to suddenly find myself in the yard of a home. On every occasion I would go to sleep feeling exhausted. It was just a miracle that I always managed to wake up just as dawn came.

The grass that had a stranglehold on my feet during the evenings remained stubborn and relentless during the day. The seemingly ever-increasing weight of the briefcase with my worldly possessions had become a real impediment to my progress.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were not very different from the Saturday and Sunday before them. The only difference was the heightened anxiety I felt from Tuesday onwards. I still had not crossed the border as I had hoped, and I was almost certain the whistle had been blown about my disappearance. I was now afraid of making contact with humans lest they should identify that I was the missing person and report me to the security agents of the Rhodesian regime.

Thursday morning I woke up tired and demoralised. The longer it took me to reach the border, the more paranoid I became about being caught. I had no alternative but to carry on. It was dawn and I had walked for about a kilometre when I bumped into a fence. At first I did not realize the significance of what had happened. When it finally dawned on me that this was the border fence, my adrenaline began pumping. I had, without knowing it, slept a kilometre away from the border with Portuguese East Africa!

One can understand the excitement and relief I felt when, after four and half days, I reached and crossed the border. My ‘companion’ had been dependable and accurate in guiding me to this destination. The fear of the invisible eyes of the Rhodesian security apparatus was now a thing of the past, or so I thought. I now wondered what sort of welcome to expect from the inhabitants of Portuguese East Africa, especially their victorious liberation forces, FRELIMO. Although the independent state of Mozambique, as Portuguese East Africa came to be known, had not yet been proclaimed following the signing of a cease fire agreement on 8 September 1974, FRELIMO was now the de facto government. The outgoing Portuguese regime would not now have the motivation or moral authority to act in concert with the white minority regime in Rhodesia. Because of this realisation, the apprehensions and fears that had accompanied me from Rhodesia were swept aside. I drew comfort also from the belief that FRELIMO, with its history of revolutionary armed struggle, could not be expected to collude with the heinous Smith regime.

A kilometre inside Mozambique I came across a dusty road with a direction post pointing to ‘Espungabera’. With great relief I followed the sign.

My quiet celebration was rudely interrupted by the sudden appearance of four armed men dressed in camouflage uniform, similar to the terrain surrounding them. They had blended so well with the terrain that, even though they were so close to me, I had not detected their presence. Their guns were levelled at me and they spoke in Portuguese. It was evident to them that I could neither speak nor understand Portuguese. In broken Shona,* which I could understand, one of the men asked where I had come from, for my identity documents, and my reason for being there. As a civilian, to be surrounded by armed men with weapons pointed at me was a terrifying experience that caused me to tremble visibly and uncontrollably.

“Look,” one of the FRELIMO soldiers said excitedly to the others while examining my driver’s license. “Rhodesia,” he read out, pausing there as if that was the only word written on the document.

“He is a spy from Rhodesia who has been sent to spoil the preparations for our independence,” the same soldier, in his broken Shona, concluded after a lengthy pause. The other soldiers nodded agreement to whatever was said without proffering their own opinions. I concluded that the soldier who always spoke was the leader of the group.

My trembling had increased and together with the sweat beads rapidly forming on my face, I was a convincing picture of who he said I was. My protestations that I was not a spy but one who sought a means of joining the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe were ignored and I was force marched at gun point to Espungabera.

My earlier belief that FRELIMO would not do anything suggestive of complicity with the Rhodesian regime was dashed as I found myself thrown into a cell that, for the next two weeks, became the space I shared with a convicted murderer.

Our cell was about four by four metres. In one corner was a bucket that served as our toilet, with a piece of cardboard box as its lid. For the two weeks I was incarcerated, our ‘toilet’ was emptied only twice. We were each provided with two flimsy blankets and we had no bed or mattress or even a pillow. In the corner opposite our ‘toilet’ we prepared our sleeping positions, since the smell from our ‘toilet’ was less intense there. For the same reason, we fed and spent most of our time during the day seated on our sleeping positions.

Food was served twice a day. At around 8 am we were given a small cup of black tea and one *pau*.* Late in the afternoon, around 4 pm, we got our last meal consisting of a small portion of rice and one piece of meat. Throughout the whole day and evening we were confined to our tiny room without engaging in any activity at all.

It is standard procedure that prisoners are made to surrender their belongings before they are put into cells. I was pleasantly surprised when I was allowed to keep my briefcase containing all my worldly possessions. At first I could not understand the rationale behind this ‘reasonableness’. Only after I had voluntarily lost most of those possessions did the truth hit me.

The diet we were given was so meagre I felt I would starve to death. My cellmate, however, was in an enviable position. His relatives brought him supplementary food which he shared with the prison guards most of the time. While I was starving, my cellmate always had a surplus that he did not share with me. Once every day my cellmate would spend a good three minutes emptying his bowels in our ‘toilet’. I needed at least three days to build such capacity. During my fourth day of incarceration, one of our guards casually suggested that if I had some money he could purchase some supplementary food. I blamed myself for not having thought about this and

started digging into my briefcase for whatever amount I still had. Since I had Rhodesian currency and not their local currency, I expected the guard to refuse it. But by accepting it I supposed they could cross the border to buy things from Rhodesia. The money wasn't much, but for the next three days the 'good' guard generously encouraged me to spend every cent I had. My health immediately improved and I began having an equal share in the use of the 'toilet' with my cellmate.

After exhausting the little amount I had raised, I went back to my starvation diet and was experiencing painful episodes of hunger. Again, the 'good' guard came to my rescue by suggesting that he could sell items of my clothing in order to raise money to supplement my feeding. Later, the guard claimed to have sold my clothing for a low amount since not many people had shown an interest. There was no way I could verify his claims. Soon I only had two trousers and two shirts, including what I was wearing.

Taking advantage of my relationship with the guard, I made an appeal to the authorities that we be allowed to leave the confines of our cell, even for brief periods each day, to undertake any chores they might deem necessary. On my tenth day, I was relieved to be told my request had been granted and we were going to be assigned some work outside our cell. We were taken out of the cell under armed escort and marched to a graveyard where we were ordered to dig a grave for an unidentified male adult who was being given a pauper's funeral. After the burial we were marched back to our cell, never to be let out again until the day of my release.

The day did come. As I left the prison I once again took stock of my remaining possessions – two pairs of trousers and two shirts (including those I was wearing), five underpants, five pairs stockings, one pair shoes, one tooth brush and toothpaste, the Holy Bible, a novel, wrist watch, school certificates and a school exercise book. It suddenly dawned on me that by allowing me to keep my briefcase the prison guards knew they would dispossess me of my few belongings as I sought a way to assuage my hunger.

News of my imminent release had brought me great excitement, but it was short lived. Upon my release, the chief warden informed me that I was being taken back to Rhodesia. My protestations that I would be arrested or even hanged if I went back to Rhodesia fell on deaf ears.

The fear of the invisible eyes of the Rhodesian security apparatus, which I thought was a thing of the past, and the belief that FRELIMO would not

collude with the Smith regime proved to be misplaced and mere wishful thinking. With an armed escort I was force marched to the border with Rhodesia and ordered to scale the border fence under the watchful eyes of FRELIMO soldiers.

I had no option but to comply with the order. Having made sure I had crossed back into Rhodesia, the FRELIMO soldiers went back to Espungabera, while I walked about half a kilometre into Rhodesia and lay low for an hour. Then, convinced that there were no FRELIMO soldiers at the border close to where I was, I climbed over the fence once again, back into Mozambique.

A short distance along the road to Espungabera, a wider road branched off in the direction of Gogoi. I took this road which, according to my companion map, would eventually link up with another main road leading to Beira. I believed that once I reached Beira I would be united with other comrades who had preceded me in coming to join the armed struggle.

I walked along the road and at the sound of oncoming traffic I would dash for cover, fearing that the vehicle/s might carry FRELIMO soldiers. Walking under cover of darkness was preferable as it provided protection from both the hot day temperatures and the prying eyes of the extremely vigilant FRELIMO soldiers. I went on until after midnight then, feeling physically and emotionally drained, I knew I could go no further that night. About 20 metres off the main road I crumpled beneath a big tree and mercifully fell into a deep slumber.

At around 5 am I woke up and resumed my journey. I felt hungry and mentally fatigued, but I carried on. Around 10 am I bought some *pau* and water from a remote rural shop, using the change from the sale of my clothes. I felt good and energised as I resumed my walk. In front of me I was closing in on two old men who were headed in the same direction. I decided that I should walk along with them; hopefully hoodwinking any FRELIMO we might come across into believing the three of us were one family unit. The elderly men could comprehend some Shona. From time to time, especially when passing close to FRELIMO soldiers, I would initiate idle conversation to create an impression of a family in intimate discussion.

The ruse appeared to work well until we reached Gogoi. There were four or five small groups of FRELIMO soldiers maintaining a reasonable distance from one another. They were engaged in different activities. Some seemed to be looking for items to buy from the shops or vendors marketing

their products outside the shops. Others seemed to be conducting random interviews or searches of suspected individuals. It was this latter category that caused me concern and we were close to one such group. For some reason, unexpectedly the elderly couple turned into a path that led to a big shop, passing through a group of suspicious looking FRELIMO soldiers. I was a bit slow to follow the couple, but by the time we came to the position of the soldiers I had caught up with them. But that slight hesitation must have been my undoing. The soldiers stopped us and enquired from the elderly couple whether they were traveling together with me. They honestly responded that I was a stranger who had joined them along the way.

The soldiers' interest was immediately riveted on my abnormal looking briefcase and me. Their commander spoke some words to me in Portuguese that I could not understand. Seeing that I looked frightened and confused, the commander cocked his gun and his men followed suit. In broken Shona I was ordered to produce my identification. My Rhodesian driver's licence again caught their attention. I was asked to produce my passport, to which I responded that I did not have one. By the time the preliminary interrogation was over I had been put under armed guard and my briefcase had been combed through, item by item. The elderly couple was harshly rebuked for not reporting the presence of a stranger before they were allowed to proceed with their journey.

It was dark when an order was given for the group, in which I was now prisoner, to move. We left the township and followed narrow winding paths through thick forest for kilometres on end. Throughout the march the group maintained silence, inducing in me a fear of what to expect at the final destination. It was just after midnight when we approached a cluster of grass-thatched huts, partially concealed by some thick vegetation. It was a relief to discover that this was our final destination. I was shoved into a small hut and an armed guard was posted at the entrance.

Just when I thought that finally I would be allowed to rest for the evening, two soldiers entered the hut and for the next one and a half hours interrogated me. In response to their probing questions, I told how I had first crossed the border into Mozambique, my detention at Espungabera, my release and forced return to Rhodesia, my second entry into Mozambique that resulted in my current predicament. I stressed my desire to join the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe and the fate that awaited me if I

were to be sent back to Rhodesia. At 2 am I was given a single worn out blanket and told to rest for the evening.

Two and half hours later I was woken up, told to fold my blanket and clean my hut. I now regretted my decision to venture into Mozambique alone, even though for a noble cause. I should have tried harder to connect with the comrades who were operating inside Rhodesia, and maybe my road to the liberation struggle might have been smoother. The belief I had that FRELIMO would welcome me as a revolutionary hero and guide me to where other comrades received guerrilla training, had once again been proven wrong. So far all I had encountered were obstacles and more obstacles. The rest of that Sunday passed without incident. I was given a cup of black tea and one *pau* around 8 am, *sadza** and vegetables at 2 pm and *sadza* and beans at 7 pm.

At 3.30 the following morning I was woken up, not to fold my blanket or clean my hut, but to meet the base commander. Our encounter lasted only a few minutes, but its impact was devastating. I was to be taken back to Rhodesia!

No amount of wailing or pleading could change the decision. With an escort of four armed men I was once more marched back to the border with Rhodesia.

The FRELIMO soldiers watched me from their side of the border as I walked deeper into Rhodesia, resigned to my fate. For three weeks I had disappeared without trace. What explanation would I give to the Rhodesian authorities for my disappearance and sudden reappearance, if I were found out? No doubt, with the position I held as the most senior executive officer for Neshuro African Council, my disappearance was quickly noticed and, equally without doubt, reported in the news media. If discovered, should I feign having been abducted and then managing to escape? Would the authorities be convinced by my professed innocence? If they doubted my story and decided to torture me, could I withstand the pain and stick to my story or would I be forced to admit the truth? These and many other thoughts raced through my mind as I moved further and further away from the border with Mozambique and deeper into Rhodesia.

The vast expanse of tea plantations that soon spread before my eyes, I later learned, is collectively known as the Southdown Estates. The specific estate where I found myself was known as Munyasa. No black man could own a tea plantation then and I thought the name ‘Munyasa’ must have

some local significance and was nothing to do with the official name of the estate or the identity of the owner.

In front of me was a large store with a veranda. About forty metres east of this store was a beerhall that was bustling with activity. I estimated the number of customers at this beerhall at around fifty, judging from the animated noise coming from inside the place and its environs.

I went and sat on the store veranda with my back resting against one of its pillars and my briefcase tucked between my legs. I had no Rhodesian currency with which to purchase items from the store or beer from the beer hall. It was now about 5.50 pm and in the next ten minutes the store would be closing.

I was debating whether to go and sit at the beer hall where it might be easier to make acquaintances or to remain where I was, when a young man on a bicycle and bubbling with life breezed up and rested his bicycle by one of the veranda pillars. He obviously was trying to beat the closing time of the store. Moments later the young man, two packets of Madison cigarettes in hand, came out of the store. He was shoving the packets into his pocket in readiness to ride his bicycle when he saw me for the first time.

“I seem to recognise your face,” the young man said loudly walking towards me.

“I also seem to recognise you,” I lied. I don’t think I had ever seen him before. He had four of his front teeth missing.

“I come from Gutu. Could it be that’s where we met?” the young man suggested.

“Possibly yes, because I too come from Gutu.” There was a grain of truth in that response. My father originally came from Gutu, but most of his children were born and grew up in Selukwe (now Shurugwi) where he worked for many years. I never lived in Gutu and those from Gutu that I knew, we either studied at the same school or trained together or worked together.

“What brings you here?” the young man asked.

“I came to look for a relative, but since I can’t find him I now have to go back to Salisbury (now Harare). Unfortunately, there are no more buses to Salisbury today,” again I lied about looking for a relative and gambled about there being no more buses that day. I did not know the bus schedules or whether buses to Salisbury came this far.

“So, where are you going to sleep tonight?” the young man enquired.

"I really don't know because I do not know anyone around here," I honestly responded.

"In that case, would you like to come to my house for the evening?"

I was deeply touched by the kind-heartedness of this young man and without hesitation accepted the offer.

"By the way, my name is Musindo Geza, but you can call me Cindy," the young man introduced himself as we walked towards his house about a kilometre from the store.

"And I am Agrippah Mutambara," I replied.

Late in the evening there was a joyous atmosphere in Cindy's house. We were both inebriated having each downed at least eight pints of Castle Lager and also smoked a twist of marijuana that Cindy produced as he became more comfortable about our relationship. This was the first time I had smoked marijuana. I could not object to doing so for fear of making Cindy feel uncomfortable with our nascent friendship. I felt light-headed and relaxed.

Cindy and I seemed to have a natural affinity for each other. By midnight the two packets of cigarettes that Cindy had earlier bought were almost gone as we burnt one cigarette after another. However, in all our merriment I never lost sight of my desperate situation and the realisation that if things went wrong I could end up in custody at any time.

The decision I took was inevitable under the circumstances. I had to confide completely in Cindy and put my fate in his hands. The possibility of betrayal was a risk I was willing to take, but judging from the little I had learnt about Cindy's character, I was convinced that he would not let me down. I took the plunge.

"Although we have only really known each other for a few hours, my friend, you have made me feel like I have known you for ages because of your kindness and friendliness," I began my approach to a complicated subject, "I don't know what I would have done if I had not met you."

"To be quite honest Agrippah, it is you who has a likeable personality. I bet anyone, given the opportunity, would want to be your friend," Cindy responded with a seriousness that vouched for the honesty behind his words.

Encouraged, I decided to tell all. "Cindy, let me be truthful with you. You are the first person I am confiding in. After finishing what I am going to tell you, I will leave it to you to decide whether to assist me or destroy me

completely.” With every word I said, I measured the reaction on Cindy’s face. He listened attentively as I told how I had traveled to Mozambique with the intention of joining the fight for Zimbabwe’s liberation. I highlighted my disappointment when, after crossing into Mozambique, I was incarcerated. I vividly described the horrid conditions in the cell that I shared with a convicted murderer, and how my celebration at the news of my imminent release was immediately quashed by the revelation that I was going to be sent back to Rhodesia.

At this point I paused, wanting to assess the impact on Cindy of what I had just told him. His countenance exhibited sympathy for what I had gone through.

“Is that how you ended up being here today?” he asked.

“No, not at all,” was my response, “considering my position as an Executive Secretary for Neshuro Council, I knew my disappearance had been discovered and splashed in the news media. In other words, I had become a fugitive. So when the FRELIMO soldiers took me to the border fence and ordered me back into Rhodesia, I pretended to comply, but as soon as they turned their backs on me I scaled the fence again back into Mozambique.”

In sufficient detail I told Cindy of my efforts to reach Beira and how they were frustrated after I was detained for the second time at Gogoi. I explained the events that led to my second deportation, and then concluded “that is how I came to be at Munyasa today, and the rest you know.”

After a brief pause, Musindo said, “I truly admire your courage and will do what it takes to assist and protect you.”

I was filled with emotion and tears of joy rolled freely down my cheeks. I flung myself at Musindo and hugged him while exclaiming, “Thank you, thank you, and thank you very much my dear friend.”

Musindo thus became another of my heroes, after my parents and Cuthbert.

“From now on, I shall introduce you as my visiting brother to whoever enquires about you,” Cindy said after a short reflection, “and you can continue living with me in this house.”

And so, during my early days with Cindy, I would remain alone at ‘our’ house as my ‘brother’ went to work. I would have the house cleaned and food ready to eat when he came back. One day Cindy came back from work and remarked that some people were beginning to question “why doesn’t

your brother look for a job?" In light of this development, we agreed that I should look for a job in order not to raise suspicions.

Some time in mid June 1975 I went to the tea estate recruiting offices and sought a job.

"What sort of job are you looking for?" the recruiting officer enquired.

"Picking tea," I gave a short answer to the question.

The recruiting officer looked me over as if not satisfied by the response. "What educational qualifications do you have?" he casually enquired.

"I did Standard 3," I lied. I reasoned that if I said I did GCE 'O' Level he would want to know why I did not seek a clerical post. If I had sought a clerical post they might have wanted me to produce my certificates and, maybe, there would be many more questions that would raise suspicion about why I sought a job in a tea estate.

"Don't you have any other qualifications, for instance are you a tractor driver?" the officer persisted.

"I have no other qualifications and I cannot drive," again I disappointed the expectant officer.

Finally the recruiting officer seemed to reluctantly accept that I was worth nothing else except being a tea picker. Dismissively he told me to report for work the following morning at 7 am and to join Joao's section.

For the next two weeks I was an employee at Munyasa Tea Estate. Having been accustomed to an office, tea picking was not an easy or enviable task. I got scratches all over my body from dry tree twigs and some of these scratches developed into wounds. The season of the year was winter. In the early hours of the morning it was extremely cold and the coldness was burning through my fingers. I regretted lying about whether I could drive because anything other than picking tea was preferable.

At the end of my first week I noticed there were three men who behaved unlike other workers. Around 1.30 pm every workday they would leave their section and go in the direction of an abandoned building. Again, just before work ended at 5 pm they followed the same routine. I became suspicious that they could be members of the Rhodesian special branch. One day, pretending that I was ill and wanted to go to the clinic, I went and hid myself close to that abandoned building. As usual, the trio came to the building just before 5 pm and to my horror they were using some radios to communicate. I was left with no doubt that these were men on a mission – a

security related mission. My worst fears had been confirmed and I became very afraid.

As June 25 drew closer, most Mozambican workers were given leave to go and join in the festivities to celebrate their independence. Their absence clearly revealed the heavy dependence the tea estates had on a Mozambican labor force. It also reduced the numbers of workers who could be monitored by the Rhodesian security agents. In other words, those who had skeletons to hide, like myself, became more visible and vulnerable.

In my second week as a tea picker I noted a degree of interest in me from the three dubious characters. I confided my concerns to my friend Cindy, but later we dismissed my observations as figments of imagination. Despite conveniently dismissing what could actually be a fact, alarm bells kept ringing in my head.

The following Sunday there was a football match at Ratelshoek, a tea estate adjacent to Munyasa. Cindy asked me to accompany him to watch the game and I gladly agreed. At half time we entered a nearby bottle store to buy some beers. As we were leaving the bottle store I caught a glimpse of the suspicious trio and they were unmistakably looking at me. My fear of the men turned into panic. Was it coincidence that they had looked in my direction at precisely the same moment that I looked in their direction? Were they on my trail or, like us, had they innocently come to watch the same game we had come to watch? Could it be that they had found out who I really was? Many questions raced through my mind and I had no plausible answers for them. All I knew was that I wanted to be far away from these bad men.

I told my friend that I was not feeling well and I wanted to go to our house without delay. Musindo was puzzled by my request and the urgency in my voice.

“Is your illness so serious that you cannot wait another forty five minutes for the match to end?” Musindo enquired, surprised by the suddenness of my illness.

“It’s really bad, I cannot wait any longer. We have to go right away,” I responded.

“If it’s so serious, its better I take you to the clinic right away,” insisted Musindo.

“I don’t want to go to the clinic, I want to go and rest at the house,” I put my foot down. Cindy made no further arguments and accompanied me to

our house.

Inside our house I addressed my friend. "Cindy, remember those three men I talked to you about some days ago, I am convinced they are stalking me."

"How can you be so positive my friend?" Musindo enquired.

"At the football match this afternoon they were looking at me, and this time I am positive about this. There is something in their eyes that convinces me they have some special interest in me," I replied very seriously.

"What then do you suggest we do?"

"My dearest Cindy," I paused a little before proceeding, "I have decided that tomorrow I am going back to Mozambique."

"What? Musindo sounded perplexed, "have I heard you correctly?"

"After all you have sacrificed for me I regret to say to you, my friend, that I have no other option but to leave you."

We were both silent for a few moments, as if we were honouring the memory of a deceased friend or relative. The significance and enormity of what I had said began to sink in and we were overcome by emotion. We embraced each other and cried on each other's shoulder, allowing our emotions to freely boil over. Cindy was the first to regain composure.

"Agrippah, my dear friend, I am going with you."

"What?" It was now my turn to be perplexed.

"You heard me correctly," was the subdued response from my friend, "what would I tell people if my brother suddenly disappeared?"

We stared at each other in disbelief about what we had been saying and the significance of it all. Again we embraced, not in mourning but in celebration of our newly discovered comradeship.

"When do you propose we begin our journey?" Cindy broke the ice.

"Tomorrow at sunset," I responded without a second thought.

"Why can we not wait two days so that we can get our pay?" Wages were paid on the last day of the month. If this coincided with a weekend or holiday, then payment was on the next working day.

"Two days will be too late. By then we might find ourselves behind bars." To my family my disappearance had been a mystery. I had not given any hint to my parents, brothers, sisters, or even my friends of my intentions. Having made up my mind that tomorrow would be 'D' day, I suddenly felt the urge to communicate with my young brother David, with

whom I enjoyed a special relationship. I got him over the phone at his workplace in Salisbury, swore him to secrecy, and asked him to take a bus that day or early the next day and come without fail to the address where I was presently located.

Noon next day my brother arrived. We had an emotional reunion after which I informed him of what I had been through during the last one and a half months. He shared with me the anguish that the family, especially my parents, was going through as a result of my disappearance. I informed my young brother that I had decided to go back to Mozambique, but he should not let anyone know we had met. The same emotions generated by our reunion were repeated as we said farewell to each other. He took the last bus going to Salisbury that day.

Three hours after saying goodbye to David, Cindy and I were headed for Espungabera. The vigilant FRELIMO soldiers who had accosted me when I first entered Mozambique were conspicuous by their absence. Then, there had been euphoria and anticipation as the country braced itself for its first post-colonial government. During my last entry there had been suspicion on the part of FRELIMO that the Portuguese would do something at the very last hour to forestall the attainment of their cherished goal – a free and independent Mozambique. Now that the goal had been achieved they considered the threat gone and with it, apparently, their vigilance.

On arrival at Espungabera the same officials who had ordered my detention during my last unceremonious visit recognised me. They were impressed by my determination to join Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and were now convinced of the seriousness of my purpose. Instead of being harassed and detained, Cindy and I were treated with dignity and promised a speedy transfer to one of the refugee camps.

My 'good' friend who had been my lifeline when I was in prison arrived and was in a jovial mood. He was dressed in my clothes. On seeing his victim, the transformation in his countenance was sudden and revealing. I knew without doubt now why my clothes had fetched a low amount.

* *Shona* is the main local language spoken in Zimbabwe. It has many dialects such as Zezuru, Karanga, Ndau, etc.

* *Pau* is a Portuguese name for bread. A *pau* is about a quarter the size of a normal loaf of bread, like a bread roll.

* Sadza is a popular staple diet in southern Africa. It is thickened porridge mostly prepared from corn (maize) meal.

Chapter 3

REFUGEES – NOT BY CHOICE

One late afternoon at the end of the first week of July 1975 we alighted from a FRELIMO truck that had brought us from Espungabera at Machazi refugee camp in Chibabava district. There were five of us; Musindo, myself and three others who had arrived at Espungabera two days earlier than us. We had been fore-warned that we would be transferred to a refugee camp where we would be united with other Zimbabwean refugees who had preceded us.

The term ‘refugee’ had a repugnant resonance to my ears. I had forsaken a reasonably good life and placed both my family and myself in grave danger, not to come and be a refugee in Mozambique, but a fighter for freedom and independence.

The FRELIMO escort that had brought us to this camp handed us over to members of the camp administration and immediately left. This refugee camp had many crudely constructed wooden structures with grass-thatched roofs, all arranged in clusters. The cluster of round huts where we had arrived belonged to the security department and it was the entry point for all newcomers to the camp. Later, I also came to know there were a number of clusters making up the camp; each cluster grouped persons of a commonality. Some of the cluster distinctions included male barracks, female barracks, medical department, logistics department, and the security department in which we now found ourselves.

We stood with our few belongings waiting to be told where to go when the shrill sound of a whistle was heard. Suddenly from all directions people raced towards a focal point, each holding a wooden replica of a gun. When the race began, the five of us who had just arrived wanted to run away in fear and panic, but a calm authoritative voice ordered us to remain where we were. From the various clusters, camouflaged and hidden by the dense foliage in which they were constructed, I was surprised that around 200 refugees had emerged and in the space of a few minutes, congregated at one

place that I later learned was called a parade ground. The refugees were formed up in military formations and maintained a disciplined silence. Shortly after the parade was formed the commanders, who I later knew to be trained guerrillas, armed with genuine automatic rifles, joined the refugees at the parade ground. I could not hear what was being said, but soon there was a chorus of what sounded like church songs.

We were trying to make head or tail of the words of the songs when an order was given for us to move into one of the huts near us. Inside the hut we were ordered to remove our clothes and put on new clothing we were given. All the clothes and personal effects I had brought from Rhodesia, including the Holy Bible, school certificates, my wrist watch, and the pair of shoes I was wearing, were all confiscated and I never saw them again.

For the next three days we underwent intensive interrogation to determine whether we had all genuinely come to join the armed struggle, or were agents sent by the Smith regime to infiltrate the liberation movement. During this period we spent the days and nights in the hut, not as prisoners, but not free to go out of our own volition. Even to go to the toilet we had to be escorted. At random times during the day, and in the evenings too, we were individually escorted to a separate hut for interrogation. There was no physical molestation, but intimidation and other pressure tactics were used to solicit confessions from potential enemy agents. A range of questions were asked such as "What are your educational and professional qualifications?" "Why did you choose to join the armed struggle when you had such a nice job?" "Who told you Mozambique was taking people for guerrilla training?"

When the security vetting ended and we were cleared, we were required to adopt names by which we wanted to be identified. Such assumed names, or *nom de guerre*, were termed 'Chimurenga names' according to our revolutionary parlance. The reason for adopting Chimurenga names was to conceal the true identity of comrades, whose mere decision to join the armed struggle, and acts of bravery against the settler regime stigmatised them as terrorists and risked attracting severe retribution against relatives still living in Rhodesia.

Given the challenge to come up with a name, I first imagined myself being a courageous and feared guerrilla commander. To suit the expectation I had of myself I wanted a name that would drive fear into the heart of the enemy. I decided my first name should be 'Dragon' (the monster that spits

fire). For my surname, I wanted a longish and equally fearsome Shona name. I came up with “Patiripakashata” which literally means, “Where we are is dangerous”, or by intimation, “we are dangerous”.

From the day I adopted Dragon Patiripakashata as my Chimurenga name, my real name (Agrippah Mutambara) was dead and buried, only to be resurrected a year after the attainment of independence.

Not all who came as refugees were cleared during the interrogation. Some confessed to being agents of the Rhodesian regime. In some instances, spy gadgets were discovered on clothing that had been surrendered. Contrary to expectations, those proven to be enemy agents were not killed but detained for longer periods during which time they were politicised to appreciate the value of identifying with the people’s struggle. Some were completely converted and became heroes of our struggle. A few others escaped, when the opportunity arose, and went back to rejoin the enemy ranks.

It was taboo in our struggle to ask for someone’s real name or where in Rhodesia one came from. Whoever did so was immediately suspected of being an enemy agent wishing to betray comrades.

In later months as the number of Rhodesian refugees began to increase by leaps and bounds, new arrivals were given any random Chimurenga names without the option of making their own choice. Sometimes two or more comrades ended up sharing the same name. Almost all Chimurenga names expressed our hopes and aspirations. Typical Chimurenga names included; Ridzai Gidi (fire the gun), Farai Tichatonga (Rejoice we shall rule), Tererai Midzimu (heed the spirit mediums), Mabhunu Muchapera (Boers shall be vanquished), Tongai Zimbabwe (rule Zimbabwe), etc.

Whereas the ZANLA forces and the ‘refugees’ needed to operate under the protective cover of Chimurenga names, the same could not be said of the ZANU political leadership who were the public or visible face of ZANLA. The ZANU leadership needed to be openly identifiable to the party’s support base in Rhodesia and abroad. Naturally, because they could not operate incognito, they were equally visible to the regime we sought to destroy and replace. It is for this reason that our political leaders like Comrades Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, Simon Muzenda, Joseph Musika, Edison Zvobgo, Willie Musarurwa, and many others, had to use their real names at all times.

A deluge of refugees from Rhodesia flooded into Mozambique, through its now porous border, soon after it attained its independence. Maybe, with few exceptions, their ultimate aim was to join the ranks of freedom fighters. Regardless of the motive, anyone who came through the route of a refugee camp was accorded refugee status and was entitled to humanitarian aid from relevant organs of the United Nations and other international bodies. Such aid was administered through the Mozambican government. We obviously benefited from the recognition, protections and privileges accorded to refugees.

Life in refugee camps was mostly boring. For the most part during the day, refugees were engaged in activities such as constructing barracks, huts and latrines; practising military drills; attending political orientation classes; performing guard duties and cooking food for camp occupants; other specialised functions e.g. medics attending to the sick, security personnel vetting new arrivals, logistics personnel with overall responsibility over all logistic related matters, and so forth. Evening activities mainly centered on guard duties and political lessons.

Despite the good and tireless efforts of the Mozambican authorities, and our own endeavours as an organization, the huge influx into refugee camps soon created a crisis situation as supplies could not meet demand. In the best of times, refugees had three meals a day, but this dwindled to a single meal in two or even three days as the food crisis deepened. This had an immediate social impact as the refugees began trading their clothes and other personal items with the local population in exchange for food, tobacco and dagga.* These isolated individual survival tactics soon expanded into organised syndicate initiatives. The situation spiraled out of control and led to the disappearance of other basic necessities like blankets, plates, etc. Worse still, there was an erosion of discipline. I shall return to this topic later.

Some refugees had to resort to some extreme measures in order to survive. I recall a group of six refugees who were expert at hunting snakes. Everyday they would catch three or four big snakes, remove the poison from their bodies and prepare them as a delicacy. At first the thought of eating a snake was so repulsive that I looked down upon the six as being primitive. Two months later, my opinion and prejudice about them had changed, and in fact I had become one of them. I adopted and was guided

by one simple philosophy – any meat that is not human or pet (for ethical reasons) and is not poisonous, can be eaten.

On the other hand, the overcrowded camps and the worsening food situation had attendant consequences. Bodies began to waste away and diseases started taking their toll. In addition to the common problems such as headaches, stomach-aches, dysentery, tuberculosis, flu, malaria, etc., some strange illnesses began afflicting the refugees. One such illness we named ‘hurricane’. The reason it was named such is that it struck the camp with the speed and devastation of a hurricane. A person with this illness suffered weakness of the knee joints and moved like a chameleon – take a step forward, hesitate midway before completing the step. It seemed as if the knees had springs in them. It was a remarkable spectacle to watch dozens of refugees moving in this manner and all at the same time.

I was fortunate not to suffer from this strange illness that seemed to have no known cure but that in six to eight days disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. Unlike its namesake, the ‘hurricane’ left behind no scars or visible signs of ever having been present. It defies scientific explanation as to why so many were afflicted by a mysterious illness at the same time and for almost the same duration.

What also caused me and many other refugees great pain and torment were the bites from jigger* fleas. The females of these tiny wingless insects burrow into the skin, causing painful sores. The usual entry point for these tiny insects is the area between the toe nails or finger nails and the soft skin beneath that they cover. To take them out soon after entry using a pin causes a lot of pain. Some comrades advised that it was better to leave them in one’s skin and wait for them to come out of their own volition. Heeding such advice was the most terrible blunder one could ever make. Inside one’s foot or finger the jigger flea would create a sackful of eggs that would hatch into tiny fleas. When hatched, twenty or more young ones would seek freedom by leaving their birthplace and coming out of the skin, but only to burrow their way back into the foot or fingers independently and in many different places. Many comrades lost their toes and were permanently maimed because of these jigger fleas. These tiny creatures thrive and multiply in sandy and dirty conditions and the effective way to curb their multiplication was to keep the floors of the barracks and the surrounding grounds wet. For many comrades, that lesson came too late.

Discipline was the cornerstone for the successful execution of our revolutionary armed struggle. It is no surprise therefore that there was so much emphasis on individual as well as collective discipline from the moment one entered a refugee camp. Comrade Robert Mugabe aptly defined internal discipline as, ‘a state of order within an individual that propels him constantly to do right things. It is a stage of human development that resolves the contradictions within an individual.’ Military drills and political orientation were the avenues through which discipline was imparted and regulated.

Through drills one learned to respect authority and to comply with orders from superiors. Refugees were placed in formation order. Each refugee knew the exact section of a particular platoon in a specific company of a given battalion that he belonged to. Knowing the formation one belonged to made it easy to immediately identify any absconders. In any gathering of refugees, be it as small as two, there was always one considered the most senior. Understanding this concept was essential and expected of everyone because wherever and whenever the situation demanded, the most senior in a group would issue orders. A lot of time was devoted to training refugees to march in their formations and this could be a tiresome and boring routine.

There were numerous occasions when an emergency whistle would be blown for refugees to assemble in formation order. During these occasions a number of comrades would be found to have absconded and gone to trade their merchandise with the *povo*. On their return, the camp administration would have deployed other comrades to lie in ambush for their return. The culprits, once apprehended, would be taken, together with their spoils, to the parade ground.

The punishment meted out to the culprits was brutal and severe. While the whole parade reverberated from the sorrowful song that translates to, ‘*remember the day when you left your parents crying in anguish*,’ the offenders would be lashed with a cane until they sounded an ‘*emergency*’. You were deemed to have sounded an emergency once you defecated and the flies started circling above your buttocks. Then, and only then, would the lashing and singing come to an end. The temptation was for one to sound the *emergency* after only a few lashes. However, it seemed as if the lashes had the effect of expanding the buttocks and sealing off the natural escape route that divides the buttocks into two equal parts. In nearly every

instance, an *emergency* was preceded by the involuntary wetting of one's pants.

After receiving punishment a cadre had to stand erect and shout out the slogan 'Forward with the struggle and down with illegal trading, down with stealing!'

Not even such drastic disciplinary measures could stem the tide of refugees taking the necessary risk for survival. To minimise the possibility of detection when undertaking these illegal escapades, one had to connive with a friend on guard duty to turn a blind eye when leaving or re-entering the camp. If the mission was a success, the guard would share the spoils.

On two occasions I was apprehended returning from such a mission. On the first occasion it had taken me too long to find *povo* willing to enter into barter deals and by the time I returned to the camp, the guards I had corrupted had been changed over. On the second occasion I went through the wrong guard position due to darkness, and got caught. I had first hand knowledge, therefore, of the application of the 'emergency rule'. In some instances the camp security laid ambushes at some villages and netted unsuspecting culprits red handed.

Every refugee was required to have a wooden imitation of a rifle. The 'rifle' was to be treated like a genuine gun – never to be left unattended and never to be pointed at a comrade. Severe penalties were meted out to any transgressors.

A lot of time and effort was invested in giving political orientation to refugees. Political lessons highlighted the National Grievances that constituted the *raison d'être* for choosing to come and join the armed struggle. The pouring out of National Grievances was thus the foundation upon which further political orientation and military training were built. Chief amongst the National Grievances were the issues related to the dispossession of land and the brutality and oppression of the blacks by a minority white settler regime.

Once a firm foundation was laid, the 'refugees' were introduced to the history of the colonisation of Rhodesia and the various phases of resistance to it that led to the formation of nationalist parties like the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). A lot of emphasis was placed on the history of ZANU and its adoption of armed struggle as the principal form of opposition capable of defeating the colonial regime in Rhodesia.

Because of the crucial and defining role politics played in the armed liberation struggle, a chapter shall be devoted to examining what I shall term ‘The Soul of the Revolution’.

The Smith regime was confronted with a Catch 22 situation. On the one hand, they knew that refugee camps were a catchment area for ZANLA recruits that needed to be neutralised, but on the other hand, to brazenly attack the ‘refugee’ camps would bring vigorous and outright condemnation from the international community. Initially, the Rhodesians could not risk losing international support, but as the liberation struggle intensified they adopted a ‘to hell with the international community’ attitude. After securing guarantees from key powerful allies – the so-called champions of democratic values – to tone down their condemnation in the event of attacks on ‘refugee’ camps, the regime proceeded to do just that.

I had spent two months at Machazi refugee camp when a group of ‘refugees’ was selected to go for training in guerrilla warfare, and I was not amongst them. Frustrated that it was taking too long before being trained, I connived with a group of thirteen colleagues to escape from the camp and go to Beira where we hoped FRELIMO would send us to Tanzania for training.

D-day arrived and we were all psychologically prepared for the great escape. Amongst the fourteen of us we had agreed that Victor Chikudo* be the leader of the group and I, the second in command. At the last parade of the day I had been allocated guard duties starting from midnight. Members of the group agreed to rendezvous at a certain point, and thirty minutes after midnight they were to come through my allotted guard position.

Each guard position was manned by two comrades. The comrade who partnered me at my guard position was not one of the 14 who had planned to escape. Being the most senior, I sent my partner to go and fetch some water to drink from the kitchen at 12.25 hours. I had calculated that it would take him a minimum of ten minutes to return, during which time my colleagues would have come and we would all be gone. Twelve thirty came and passed and there was no sign of my colleagues. My heart began to beat fast as I wondered whether our planned adventure had been discovered, or the h-hour changed at the last minute, or maybe Victor had chosen to abort the planned escape altogether without consultations.

My guard partner returned and still there was no sign of the members of our group. My panic increased as I debated how to handle the situation

should they arrive with my guard partner around. My partner had not found water at the main kitchen so I told him to go and ask for some at the clinic. It was odd that soon after coming on duty I should be asking for water to drink, but it was considered indiscipline to question an order from your commander. With a puzzled expression my partner complied.

Soon after he was gone I heard the stealthy shuffling of feet as my colleagues approached my guard position, and I heaved a sigh of relief. I left the wooden gun in my position and silently joined my colleagues and together we melted into the dark night.

We were gone for just over forty-five minutes when we heard the distant shrill of an emergency whistle from the direction of the camp. We knew that our escape had been discovered, or rather, reported. There had been a number of similar escapes by smaller groups of refugees, each comprising two to four persons, but the difference was that whereas our motive was to seek early training, theirs had been to return to Rhodesia. Most of those who absconded were apprehended either by sections sent to pursue them or by FRELIMO forces. In either case, they were brought back to the camp to face the music.

There were two factors in our favour. Firstly, we had a head start, as we did not expect hot pursuit to begin until first light. Secondly, the search was going to be concentrated in the direction of Rhodesia, as it was likely the assumption would be that our intention was to go back to Rhodesia.

As daylight broke we were a comfortable distance from the refugee camp. We walked as fast as we could along the main road leading towards Inchope. Fearing that vehicles from our camp might patrol along the highway looking for us, whenever there was a sound of a motor vehicle we quickly took cover in the surrounding thicket.

After walking for two days we felt confident that the camp administration could not pursue us this far and so we stopped hiding at the sound of oncoming vehicles. Towards the end of the third day a FRELIMO truck going in the same direction as ourselves stopped and enquired about who we were and what our destination was. We obliged by giving a truthful account of our intentions. We were given a lift, but instead of disembarking at Inchope Junction, we were driven to a FRELIMO base near Gorongosa. There we were cross-examined for hours on end. Finally, the FRELIMO commander at the base, who was introduced to us as Commander James

Bond, declared that he was going to comply with our wish and take us to Beira.

Naturally we were elated and all the way to Beira were in a celebratory mood. We were shocked when we got to Beira to be taken to a huge prison complex. We were taken to a cell through a passage that equally separated two rows of cells. Metal burglar bars formed the walls of the sides facing the passage. The bars were so closely spaced they barely allowed hands to go through.

There was great excitement amongst the prisoners as we were slowly led down the passage. Like caged dogs, the prisoners noisily drifted towards the burglar bars, hoping that we would be distributed into their already crowded cells. They jostled and shoved at each other to gain a strategic position along the burglar barred wall, stretching their hands through the gaps in an effort to touch the newcomers, while making competing claims of who each wanted to be his '*wife*'. Frustrated that we were not being placed into their cells, many partially undressed and started to masturbate invitingly facing our direction. We were terrified at the prospect of ending up in one of the cells, reduced to being '*wives*' of the sex hungry, hardcore criminals. Mercifully, we were taken to our own cell.

After five days of detention and interrogation, our fate was finally decided. We were to be taken back to the refugee camp we had come from.

An air of utter dejection engulfed the whole group as we considered what our reaction should be. Victor Chikudo suggested we had no option but to consent. Seven comrades supported him. I vehemently rejected any notion of accepting the decision and was supported by five other comrades. We communicated our diametrically opposed positions to FRELIMO officials, who did not offer an opinion.

Around 3 pm a FRELIMO truck with 12 armed soldiers parked outside our prison cell. We were all told to come out, close to the truck. The FRELIMO commander ordered all those who had accepted going back to Machazi to board the lorry. Victor and the seven comrades got into the truck. I was pleased that not all of us had been ordered to board the truck. My hope was that even if we were put back in prison, in due course they would arrange for us to go for training in Tanzania. We stood by the truck waiting for our colleagues to leave. The FRELIMO commander then addressed his men in Portuguese that we could not understand. To our dismay, the six of us who had shown intransigence were then seized by the

soldiers and thrown into the truck. Under armed escort we were all driven to Chibabava, a small town situated about 10 kilometres from Machazi refugee camp, and again thrown into prison.

The prison cell became our home for the next four weeks. During the first three weeks we were confined to our cell without being allowed to go outside. After numerous requests to be allowed outside our cell, even to do some manual work, we were finally told there was a task for us to perform.

One morning we boarded a lorry and were driven about six kilometres to a forested area. The lorry was parked beneath a big baobab tree and we were told to gather some stones and load them into the lorry. We happily committed ourselves to the task.

Unknown to us, high above on a branch of the baobab tree there was a colony of bees. The smell of diesel from the lorry parked beneath irritated the bees and the colony hurtled to the ground and immediately exploded into action. I was by the lorry side throwing in the stone I had brought. The other comrades were a distance away looking for more stones. Pandemonium broke loose. The fighter bees, determined to protect their queen, fearlessly sought to remove the perceived threat. I knew I was not equal to the challenge and dashed to take cover in the cabin of the lorry. Hastily I shut the door, but six to eight bees had beaten me to it. The size of the challenge now confronting me was manageable I thought, as I watched the swarm of bees seeking to gain entrance through the closed door. Then some of the fighters found an alternative entry. They discovered that the rear glass of the lorry cabin was missing. As they gained entry, the rest rushed to exploit the discovery. I scrambled out of the cabin and threw myself under the lorry, hoping the bees would not follow, but they did. I crawled out and ran through dense tall grass, but the bee train never left me. In defence of their queen they each selflessly put their last breath behind their stings as they planted them in every part of my body. The sight of a ditch nearby gave me hope and I threw myself down into it, hoping they would fly over me, but they stubbornly followed me down into the ditch. Desperately I scrambled out and continued to run deeper into the forest.

It then occurred to me that no matter how fast I ran, I could never outrun the bees and, secondly, if I continued running deeper into the forest the bees might kill me far away from the people and it might take a long time for my body to be found. I resigned myself to my fate and started walking back towards the nearest village. I made no effort to ward off the bees that

continued circling around me, competing to demonstrate their loyalty to their queen.

As I approached the villagers, they fled from me fearing that they too could become victims by association. By this time all the fortitude I had at the beginning to ward off my aggressors had been completely exhausted. I collapsed in the middle of the village, oblivious of the continuing assaults on my undefended body.

Only after the brave warriors had stung themselves to extinction did the people come to help. My body, especially my face and hands, were puffed and shiny black from the poisonous serum the fighter bees had injected. Countless tiny white dots marked the spots where the warriors had registered a hit. A blunt knife was used to scrape off the stings before I was rushed to hospital where I received injections to neutralize the effect of the poison. My colleagues were spared the torture I went through because when the colony of bees fell down, they were a distance away from the lorry. They could only watch helplessly as I battled my adversaries.

A week after this incident we had the first visit from commanders at Machazi Refugee Camp. They threatened to teach us a lesson we would never forget when we were surrendered to them. Incarceration was made to appear a preferable option to freedom. There were two further visits within a week and on the fourth visit we were released into their custody.

We were received back at the camp as traitors and treated as such. For three weeks we were detained and underwent the most gruelling interrogation. The cane was lavishly administered to our buttocks in an effort to obtain confessions of any possible connections to the Rhodesian security apparatus. Our situation was compounded by the admission by one member of our group that he was an agent of the Rhodesian government.

At different times of the day we were individually taken for questioning in a separate hut not far away from our prison hut. Whatever response you gave to the questions asked would be treated as brazen lies. Lashes to the buttocks would be lavishly administered to soften you up for the next interview. Those left behind in the prison hut would listen helplessly to your wailing and pleading for the punishment to stop. By the time you left the interrogation room you would have bleeding and criss-cross evidence of the painful administration of *justice*. Echoes of your screams and impassioned pleas for the punishment to end would reverberate through the pole and mud walls, thereby panicking and psychologically unnerving colleagues

awaiting their turn. Sometimes, by midnight, you would heave a sigh of relief that you had escaped torment for the day, only to be awoken at 2 am and marched to the interrogation room. At times one would falsely confess to being an enemy agent, hoping that this would bring the ordeal to an end.

Back in the prison hut, a piece of cloth, or sack, or blanket, soaked in salty water, would be spread over your buttocks to treat the lacerated flesh, causing more excruciating pain.

Three weeks after the interrogations began we were cleared of being enemy agents and re-integrated with the other refugees. I had learned one good lesson, no matter how long it took to go for training, I would wait my turn.

One Saturday morning four FRELIMO trucks roared into the camp and shortly afterwards an emergency whistle was blown. At the parade ground the commander announced the names of those who had been chosen to leave the camp. To my pleasant surprise, my name was included in the list. The destination of those leaving was not disclosed, but everyone knew that all those who were chosen would be going for training. What occupied my mind was whether the training would be in Mozambique or Tanzania.

It was close to sunset when we reached our destination. My expectations that we would be driven to Beira to board a ship for training in Tanzania had been quashed. As far as I could see, we had come nowhere near the ocean after hours of travel. It seemed we had arrived at a training camp in Mozambique.

You can imagine my disappointment when I discovered that, in fact, we had come to another refugee camp, known as Nyadzonya. The purpose of our transfer was to reduce the ballooning population of refugees at Machazi. Nyadzonya was far removed from population centers, thereby minimising the opportunities for refugees to engage in illegal trade with the local population.

When I came to Nyadzonya, my friend Musindo remained at Machazi. I never met him again during the struggle, or after independence, leading me to believe that he did not make it to an independent Zimbabwe. I shall forever remain grateful to him for sheltering me at a critical juncture in my life.

The routine at Nyadzonya closely resembled that at Machazi. The refugee population at Nyadzonya was less than at Machazi and the prevalence of strange diseases reduced. The camp took its name from a

river that marked the eastern boundary of our camp. It was a perennial river with deep and dark waters that flowed with an eerie quietness as it meandered around our camp. We used its waters for bathing and washing clothes, drinking, and for cooking. Bathing was done about a kilometre down from our camp where the river was not so deep and where people could go across the river.

On a few occasions, comrades from the operational front in Rhodesia would come to the camp in full combat gear and armed to the hilt. They would address us on parade, recounting their successes and the valour of all the comrades in the battlefield. They would hold the whole parade spellbound as they described the tactics they used to escape detection by enemy forces. Some of the tactics were mystical. For instance, some comrades claimed that if they were about to be discovered by the enemy, they could turn into cabbages and the enemy would not be able to recognise them. Once, when I was at Nyadzonya, the comrades arrived driving two private cars and a bus they had commandeered from operational areas and that still bore Rhodesian number plates.

Among the comrades who visited Nyadzonya were Comrades Makasha, Bombadiary and Morrison Nyathi, a highly respected and courageous sector commander. The effect of these rare encounters with the guerrillas from the battlefield was to re-ignite the desire to quickly be trained and be a participant, rather than a listener to these heroic deeds. However, the lessons of the Beira debacle were still fresh in my mind and no matter what the temptation, I would wait my turn.

We did not know then that a few months later the revered Nyathi would turn traitor and lead the Rhodesian soldiers to come and massacre the same refugees who held him in such awe. Luckily for me, when the Nyadzonya massacre took place I had transferred to Tembwe in the northern Tete province of Mozambique.

* cannabis

* These are sand fleas, also known as *chigoe*, found in tropical South America and Africa.

* After independence Victor Chikudo, also known as Victor Rungani, joined the Zimbabwe National Army where he rose to the rank of Colonel.

Chapter 4

GUERRILLA TRAINING

It had seemed the day would never come, but finally it did. I was among the hundred and twenty refugees chosen to board the FRELIMO trucks that had arrived as early as 5 am for an unknown destination. I was glad to be leaving the camp, but not overly optimistic about going for training. When we left Machazi I had been excited thinking that I was finally going for training, only to find myself in another refugee camp. From the day I set foot at Nyadzonya, the refugee population had more than trebled to just over 800. Maybe we were now being transferred in order to depopulate the camp.

We drove during the day through many settlements and small towns whose buildings bore the scars of the fight against Portuguese colonialism. Our first stop, around 2pm, was at a FRELIMO garrison where we were each given three *paus* and some orange juice for our lunch. After a break of one and a half hours we resumed our travel. Around 8.15 pm we arrived at a town called Tete, which I knew from my study of geography is in northern Mozambique. We drove to another FRELIMO garrison in Tete to refuel. From what I had seen so far, Rhodesia was more developed than Mozambique.

From Tete we drove for about two hours through a dense forest. It was difficult to determine the expanse of the forest because it was now dark. Suddenly, a wooden boom straddling the road brought our convoy to a halt. Seemingly from nowhere, a guard manning the roadblock appeared, armed with a submachine gun* similar to those used by our commanders at Nyadzonya.

The guard approached the lead vehicle, in which I was a passenger. He quickly scanned the whole convoy, looking for signs of impending danger. Satisfied there was none, and with authority and great confidence, he approached the driver of the lead vehicle and challenged him to identify himself and to state the purpose of his mission. After a few verbal

exchanges, the driver gave the guard some papers. Using the beam of a pencil torch, the guard scrutinised the papers, but without relaxing his vigilance.

During all this time, the guard's right index finger rested on the trigger of his gun, ready to explode into action should the necessity arise. Finally, satisfied with the explanations given, the guard allowed the whole convoy to proceed.

As we drove past the guard, I saw for the first time two other guards, one on either side of the road. They were partially concealed by the trees behind which they took cover and by a combination of the dark green camouflage uniform they wore and the darkness that distorted their form. They too were armed with sub-machine guns, professionally held and ready to be fired.

We drove for another one and half to two kilometres with no sign of life then, all of a sudden, came to yet another boom. Our experiences at the first boom were repeated before the guard allowed us to proceed. About 500 metres further down the road the convoy came to an abrupt halt. I wondered why we had to stop now as there was no boom to restrict our passage. The engines and lights of all our vehicles were turned off and as my eyes began to adjust to the new lighting conditions, I was surprised to see we were in the middle of a camp.

The time was past 11 pm and there were no fires or lights to give away the existence or location of the camp. Neither were there unnecessary movements of people, or evidence of the presence of animals. There was absolute silence which was only broken by the camp officials who came to meet us.

I began wondering whether we had come to a FRELIMO camp. But when the officials, all armed with automatic rifles and not the wooden replicas used in the refugee camps, addressed us in *shona* with a distinct Zimbabwean accent, my doubts were put to rest and so were the anxieties I had that we were being moved to yet another refugee camp.

The main ZANLA training camps in Tanzania were Nachingwea and Mgagao. In Mozambique they were Tembwe in Tete Province and Mapinduzi, later renamed Takawira, located at Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters in Manica Province. Our group had been assigned to Tembwe Training Camp.

The group of trainees that preceded us had already completed their training and been deployed. Remaining in the camp were officers and

veterans (referred to as instructor assistants) who would be responsible for our training.

The routine for the first three weeks at Tembwe closely resembled that at the refugee camps. We were engaged in the construction of our barracks, attending political lessons, and practising military drills. A typical day in the life of a trainee was something like this:

0400 – 0410 at the sound of a whistle, assemble on parade in correct military formations
0410 – 0430 actual attendance on parade reconciled with expected attendance
0430 – 0530 *toi toi* (jogging) for about 10 kilometres from base
0530 – 0600 collect firewood or construction materials for barracks, etc
0600 – 0800 walk back in formation order to base
0800 – 0930 form up at parade and practise marching drills
0930 – 1100 breakfast
1100 – 1300 go to respective training group in accordance with training syllabus
1300 – 1430 lunch
1430 – 1700 continue training in accordance with syllabus
1700 – 1730 evening parade
1730 – 2000 bath and supper
2000 – 2200 political orientation
2200 retire to bed

The 4 am whistle signalled the start of a day. We would quickly form up into our company formations and, led by the officers and veterans, we would run and sing in unison for ten to fifteen kilometres to go and fetch firewood or materials for constructing barracks or any other buildings.

In those early days, running ten kilometres non-stop was taxing for all new recruits. Many recruits would fall behind and start walking due to exhaustion. Veterans following close behind, and with whip in hand, would beat the tiredness out of the exhausted recruits. Only in very rare cases would the whip fail to persuade a recruit to resist tiredness. At the end of the first three weeks all recruits, unless afflicted by some illness, found it easier to complete the distance than when we first began.

Our training syllabus was made up of modules with specific time frames to be adhered to. (The table in the appendices on page 270 shows how the course was structured, according to Wilfred Mhanda.*)

What we had considered a tough test of endurance, running 10 kilometres without a break, turned out to be a picnic when the actual training in guerrilla tactics began. We were split into groups of 20 and each group was headed by a Member of General Staff (instructor) aided by four veterans.

I remember vividly our first lesson in field craft. The instructor heading our group began his first lecture by explaining the myth surrounding guerrilla operations and tactics.

“You have all heard how the guerrillas are able to disappear when confronted by an enemy, haven’t you?” he said. We all gave a positive response to this question.

I had first heard the myths surrounding guerrillas’ operational tactics before I came to join the armed struggle. It was common talk among the villagers, some dramatising battles between the comrades and the Rhodesian soldiers they had never seen but which they swore they had witnessed. They would tell how the guerrillas were able to turn into cabbages when confronted by enemy forces, or simply disappear. I had taken these stories as just hollow propaganda. But the commanders from the battlefield who occasionally visited Nyadzonya refugee camp had confirmed the veracity of these myths.

“Yes it is true, the comrades are able to disappear, and by the time you finish my course you will all know how to disappear right in the eyes of the enemy,” the instructor explained to a mesmerised audience. “I want your undivided attention to what I will teach you and total commitment to what you will be told to do,” the instructor was making a plea to the already converted. Who in his right mind would refuse to learn how to disappear when engaged in combat with the enemy? There was excitement on the faces of all the recruits as we absorbed every word our instructor said. ‘Maybe there was some magic potion that would be smeared on all the comrades to make us invisible,’ most of us thought.

After enthusing us with high expectations, the instructor called upon two veterans to demonstrate a few tactics. In our group the veterans were all female comrades.

“Comrades,” the instructor barked out an order, “attention.” The veterans stood at attention and awaited the next order.

“Prone position, take.” The veterans responded to the order by thrusting their left feet forward, bending their left knees and extending their left arms forward, coming to lie on the ground with their bodies propped up by the left arms that were level with the ground from the elbow to the wrist. The whole manoeuvre was done smoothly and effortlessly in synchronised moves.

“Comrades, up!” the instructor gave another instruction and the veterans, with the same synchronised moves, got up and stood to attention. It all seemed so easy. When the instructor asked for volunteers from the trainees to follow the example shown by the veterans, we all had our hands in the air.

Two by two we all took turns to repeat the demonstration. It was not as easy as the veterans had made it appear, but also not too difficult. The whole of the first day was spent perfecting that basic manoeuvre.

The second day, after rehearsing the basic manoeuvre a few more times, the instructor ordered the veterans to demonstrate the next stage.

“Attention, prone position, take,” the instructor gave the order as before. The veterans once again effortlessly adopted the ordered position.

“Crawl!” the instructor further ordered the veterans. The veterans quickly crawled by moving the left arm forward and pushing the whole body forward by exerting pressure on the right heel. Again the manoeuvre was made to appear so easy. Then it was the turn of the recruits to practise what had been demonstrated.

What started as simple manoeuvres proved to be the most difficult stage of guerrilla training. To perfect the movement of the whole body, using the left arm and the right foot while keeping the whole body as close as possible to the ground, was in itself a daunting task. To repeat this procedure over a long distance on rough terrain became a painful and punishing experience.

As you got tired, the veterans would urge you to overcome tiredness and continue crawling. When you felt you had been driven to the limit, the veterans would be generous with their whips as they continued to urge, “Crawl, comrade!”

Faced with the ominous presence of the whip above and the tiredness from within, one quickly learned to acknowledge that tiredness is a psychological condition that afflicts the mind and can be controlled and regulated.

Continuously putting the weight of your body on your elbow in this way makes the skin rupture and bleed, causing extreme pain. Suffering like this, the natural reaction of most human beings is to appeal for sympathy, and the recruits did just that. The most unexpected response to the appeals was what we got – the lavish whip.

But for the instructor and his veterans, bleeding was the awaited and most desired outcome. It signalled the time was ripe to change from the soft, user friendly terrain to one that was rugged and unfriendly. As the terrain became uglier, so did the temperament of the veterans who, like the Spanish bulls, seemed aroused by the sight of red blood to charge more aggressively and lavishly with their whips.

For every trainee a measure of relief came at the end of each day's training session. But that also did not spell the end of a trainee's woes. We alternated every second day between guard duties and cooking responsibilities. Those spared from these additional responsibilities spent two or three hours taking political lessons.

Each day for about two weeks we repeated the crawling exercises, reopening the wounds of the left elbow. Satisfied that the recruits had mastered the basic crawling techniques, the instructor introduced another variation. Using both arms and knees, recruits would crawl like a baby before it learns to walk. The procedure was repeated until we were able to move swiftly using our knees and elbows and keeping our bodies as close to the ground as was humanly possible, but not before we developed more wounds to our battered knees and elbows.

By the end of the first phase of guerrilla training, the scars around the knees and elbows turned into a thick protective shield which, like the bottom of a foot, became resistant to rugged terrain. The calluses so formed could easily betray the identity of a trained comrade if captured by the enemy.

During the last week of the first phase of guerrilla training, each trainee was issued with a semi-automatic rifle (AK-47). The feel of a real gun, and not the wooden replicas we had been accustomed to in the refugee camps, caused much excitement amongst the trainees. We were shown and made to rehearse how to crawl while holding our guns. An additional tactic, complementary to crawling, was how to roll one's body from position to position with the butt of the gun tucked between the legs and the barrel held close to the stomach and chest.

A trained guerrilla was not expected to maintain a static position when engaging the enemy. One had to fire from one position for a few seconds, crawl or roll to a new position and again fire for a few seconds before shifting to yet another position. This tactic, if properly used, made it difficult for the enemy to aim accurately at a guerrilla position and also created the illusion that there were more guerrillas than the actual number firing at the enemy.

“If you master and utilise properly the tactics I have taught you” the instructor emphasised at the conclusion of his course “you will create the illusion of being able to disappear. Don’t be misled; there is no magic potion to make anyone really disappear.”

Finally, the truth about the myth that guerrillas disappeared or turned into cabbages was revealed. But when we completed our training, and without being urged to do so, we joined the ranks of all trained comrades in perpetuating the myth.

We had different instructors specialised for each phase of instruction. Weapon training was the most interesting part of guerrilla training. The instructor gave us lessons on the characteristics, maintenance and use of the basic weapons. These included semi-automatic rifles, sub-machine guns, pistols, bazookas, light machine guns, grenades, and other light infantry weapons.

We also learnt the characteristics and usage of the weapons commonly used by the enemy. This was necessary because weapons captured from the enemy could be used against them if the situation demanded. In the final stages of our struggle as we consolidated our military gains by establishing liberated areas, it was common for us to train the *povo* in their localities and arm them with weapons captured from the enemy so that they could provide the first line of their own defence against the enemy.

Emphasis was placed on the maintenance of weapons. The real and constant danger during operations was for a gun to get jammed. This was often a reflection of a lack of regular cleaning, more often than not arising from an accumulation of residual gunpowder when a gun is continuously fired, or changes in weather that could result in dampness to the gun powder causing the gun to malfunction, or clogging of the barrel of a gun from impurities in the atmosphere. Every recruit had to master the skills of disassembling and reassembling guns, even in darkness or when blindfolded, for the purpose of cleaning.

Accurate aiming of weapons was given a lot of attention too. To achieve this goal, a lot of time was spent at the firing range, sharpening shooting skills. We practised shooting from the prone, kneeling, and standing positions. After we had mastered the techniques of shooting at stationary targets, we also practised shooting at moving targets. The ability to shoot accurately at short and long ranges against stationary and moving targets was critical to the economic use of our meagre ammunition in order to inflict a high casualty rate against the enemy with a minimum wastage of bullets.

We all had to master the best way to handle our weapons to avoid accidental discharges that could result in one's own injury or death, or the injury or death of other comrades. Without adopting the correct handling procedure, a bazooka, for instance, can cause serious burns to the user or those around him/her with its back blast. Accidental firing of a weapon during operations could give away one's presence or location to the enemy.

During weapons training, we practised how best to handle our weapons when carrying out tactical crawling manoeuvres.

Equally important, we learned the various tactics and formations guerrillas use when operating in the field. Most movements were to be in the evening to avoid detection. This was particularly important when there was a movement of large numbers of guerrillas, or when entering a new operational zone where the people had not been adequately politicised.

Other tricks of the trade centered on how to cross gravel roads or paths and rivers. These were to be approached and crossed walking backwards. By so doing, the footprints would point in the direction from where the guerrillas had come, thereby causing the enemy to go in the wrong direction in pursuit of them.

The freedom fighters had to be sensitive to local traditions and beliefs in areas where they operated. Reverence was given to spirit mediums and it was taboo to denigrate local traditions and beliefs. Even in our camps at the rear, *vana Sekuru* (spirit mediums) were held in high esteem, given their own bases, and often consulted to foretell the future. There were, of course, some pretenders amongst them who made false prophesies in order to gain favour and to try to influence the course of the struggle.

Outside formal training, non essential lies were subtly allowed to do the rounds amongst recruits in an effort to engender courage and a degree of honesty among our fighters. For instance, there was a generally held view

that if one had sexual intercourse in the operational areas one would not survive in battle. The real truth was that sexual relations in operational areas could result in conflicts amongst comrades, as well as poisoning relations with the masses, and had to be strongly discouraged.

In some cases comrades would sniff ground tobacco to ingratiate themselves with the spirit mediums and, when crossing rivers, put a pinch of the snuff into a river while begging for guidance and protection from the spirits. Even if one did not believe in spirit mediums, it was inconceivable that anyone would openly argue against these beliefs.

Overall, the objective of guerrilla training was to impart knowledge of weapons and weapon handling, tactics and tactical manoeuvres, survival and first aid skills; all interwoven with a political prescription that moulded the comrades into a potent force against the oppressive regime in Rhodesia.

No comrades were expected to carry food when going on operations. The masses were the providers of our food, our clothing, and our operational intelligence. Hence the need to politicise and trust our masses and make them willing and proud, even at great risk to their lives, to contribute to the struggle in this manner. On rare occasions, comrades would carry limited rations, especially when they had to walk for days before coming to populated areas.

Although the actual training in guerrilla warfare had its pains and challenges, there was an even more painful and menacing experience for which no lessons were provided, but which was lurking throughout all our training – hunger. During our training food was a precious but scarce commodity. To be assigned a duty to cook became the most prestigious responsibility one could wish for. It seemed there were some with good connections with the administration who were assigned to cooking duties most of the time. In my case, such opportunities were few and far between. As a survival tactic I, together with a few other comrades, used to lay ambushes when the cooks were taking cooking drums down to the river for washing. We would knock these drums down, and dive inside to scrape food particles stuck to the inside walls of the drums. It was a remarkable scene to watch half of a body inside each of the drums with buttocks and feet sticking outside.

Comrade Kamudyariwa, our boarding master, sought to stop this practice by deploying veterans with whips to flog the ‘behinds’ of those caught red-handed, but to no avail. On one occasion our ambush had near fatal

consequences. Undeterred by the menacing presence of the whip-wielding veterans, one comrade and I knocked down the same drum and we both dived into it. We wedged ourselves inside the drum. The veterans applied the whips to our buttocks. The effect was that of a hammer being applied to the back of a wedge to push it further in. We locked each other inside the drum and were suffocating one another. One of the veterans noticed that our efforts to wriggle further inside or extricate ourselves from the drum were becoming feeble. He ordered the others to suspend the whipping, and with some veterans holding the drum and others holding our legs, we were pulled free from the drum almost unconscious. For me, the drum ambushes ended on this day.

Tembwe was far removed from the densely populated areas. That, added to the rigorous training schedule we went through every day, removed the appetite and strength to engage in illegal trade with the *povo*. Be that as it may, there were exceptional individuals with the audacity to travel the long distances in search of barter deals. If discovered, the ‘emergency therapy’, a common feature in the refugee camps, was surgically and mercilessly administered to the accompaniment of the sorrowful song ‘*Rangarira zuva riya rawakasiya vanamai vachingochemachema*’ (Remember the day you left the parents crying in anguish).

When I completed my basic training in guerrilla warfare, the rebel character in me had been reinforced and revolutionised and I was ready and eager to be unleashed into battle against the Rhodesian war machinery alongside other comrades.

Our expectations for an early deployment soon after completion of training were dashed by the announcement that we were to transfer to yet another camp named Sabondo. Only later were we to appreciate the wisdom of this decision.

Sabondo was situated about 15 kilometres from the main training camp at Tembwe. It was located in the middle of a game reserve and was far removed from population centres. Just before being moved to this base, we were issued with standard munitions – brand new AK rifles and six magazines of ammunition each – an event that was received with great enthusiasm.

During our period of training, the starvation ration we were getting left our bodies severely shrivelled and malnourished. The camouflage uniforms we wore seemed to be hanging on skeletons. At Sabondo, however, we

were getting at least two decent meals a day and, as a continuation of training at shooting moving targets, we hunted down game, especially warthogs that were in abundance in the game reserve. There was never a shortage of meat in the camp.

After only two weeks at Sabondo the transformation in the physique of all comrades was incredible. You began to discern swellings to the faces of all the comrades and, gradually, these extended to the rest of the body. It was like observing people with mumps and seeing them spread from the neck downwards to the rest of the body as the skeletal forms began to fill with flesh. With a few exceptions, by the end of a month all the bodies were evenly dressed in flesh and exuded great strength and purpose. Had deployment taken place immediately on completion of training, we would have been unable to cope with the rigours of travelling long distances on foot from transit bases close to the border with Rhodesia to designated operational areas. Nor would our skeletal figures have had sufficient strength to carry the huge ammunition reserves, or pieces of heavy weaponry needed to bolster our firepower against the well-equipped enemy forces.

We were in our sixth week at Sabondo when commanders withdrawn from the operational front to be allocated reinforcements arrived. Naturally, we were excited at the prospect of finally being given the opportunity to make our mark on the battlefield and, also, a little apprehensive of the unknown and uncertain future.

The emergency whistle just before dawn, two days after the arrival of the field commanders, was not entirely unexpected, but rather a little delayed. In record time every one of us formed at the parade ground, verified our numbers and stood in absolute silence while waiting to be addressed. Before this could happen, the silence was broken by the roar of vehicles driving into the camp. There was no panic from our commanders, a sure sign that the arrival of these vehicles had been anticipated.

Before the three trucks could come to a complete halt our camp commander, papers in hand and flanked by the field commanders, came to address the parade. Names of thirty comrades were read out and those named were ordered to remain at the parade ground while the rest of us were to return to our barracks.

Barely twenty minutes later we heard a stampede as the comrades who had remained on the parade ground came breezing into the barracks to

collect their personal belongings. There was a mixture of excitement and sadness as they bade us farewell. The exchange of emotions lasted less than five minutes and they had to rush to a designated meeting place.

Two hours later, the three trucks that had earlier arrived empty were now leaving the camp. The leading two trucks had the thirty comrades and their personal weapons. They all had webbing across their chests containing magazines of ammunition. It was not possible to tell the cargo of the third truck as it was covered by a tent. We imagined it would carry reserve ammunition, mortar tubes and their shells, some heavy machine guns and explosives.

“Tondorwira nyika yamaireva, tondorwira nyika yamadzibaba nemadzishe ...” (We are going to fight for the land of our forefathers and our kings ...) was the animated and melodic singing from the reinforcement that almost drowned the noise from the trucks that laboured under their weight. For some of these comrades, this was the last time we would ever see them.

Two days later the same three trucks returned and the same procedure was repeated. Following the departure of the second wave of recruits we waited four days before the return of the trucks to uplift the third wave of recruits.

Judging by the carrying capacity of the trucks, it was predictable that the fourth wave of reinforcements would clear all the remaining comrades. We waited an agonising ten days before the trucks returned. The frustration created by the delay was swept aside by the excited realisation that finally, D Day had arrived for all the remaining comrades. The commander followed the now familiar routine of reading out the names of those leaving, at the parade ground. For all of us, this was purely academic as all the remaining comrades would surely constitute the fourth and final wave of reinforcements.

The commander exhausted his list but, alas! I had not heard my name. *Maybe I was mistaken or it was a mere omission that would be rectified immediately.* I made a sign to attract the attention of the commander. Permission was granted for me to speak. I pointed out that my name had inadvertently been left out. Without giving the commander a chance to respond, four other comrades echoed the same sentiments. A response was made and it was devastating. The omission was deliberate. The five of us constituted the exceptions whose malnourished bodies were deemed not to

have recovered sufficiently to be immediately deployed, despite the VIP treatment at Sabondo. A separate programme was going to be unveiled for us.

Almost two weeks after the last reinforcement from our group left for operational deployment, the five *exceptions* were seated in a pickup truck going to a yet unknown destination. The treatment we were being accorded now was different from that before we had been trained. We had even been told we were going to Chimoio when we left Sabondo, but to us Chimoio meant nothing at all as we had not adapted to the name changes after Mozambique's independence.

Around 4 pm we came to Vila Pery. The name was familiar from my study of geography. The town bore the scars of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism. Bullet holes pocked most of the buildings, and some were in complete ruins. Shops that were operational were nearly empty. We moved from shop to shop looking for some food items and soft drinks, but without success. After about six failed attempts and on the verge of giving up the search, we entered a dilapidated shop and were surprised to find a few soft drinks displayed on the shelf. There was no refrigerator and the four displayed bottles were the last ones. We bought all of them and shared their warm contents.

When we were ordered back into our truck in readiness to proceed with our journey, I enquired from our commander how much longer it would take us to reach Chimoio. I was surprised to be told that we were in Chimoio and it was the name by which Vila Pery was now known. However, our final destination was between fifteen and twenty kilometres from this worn out town.

Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters comprised many different bases, including the Headquarters Base, Mbuya Nehanda (female Base), Mapinduzi* (first renamed Takawira Base and later Takawaira Base 1), Percy Ntini Base, Parirenyatwa[†] (hospital base), National Stores Base, and later, Takawira Base 2 (new training base we called 'Taks by the yellow river').

Mapinduzi was a training base. There were cadres undergoing basic training in guerrilla warfare (thank God I had gone past that stage), and there were those who had completed their basic training and were now specialising in different fields. Areas of specialisation included the handling and use of heavy machine guns, multi-barrelled anti aircraft guns, mortar

60s and 82s, recoilless rifles, bazookas, and others. At a later stage I gained superficial knowledge in the use of all weapons, but my specific area of specialisation was explosives.

The effective use of explosives was a game changer in our struggle. Explosives had a devastating and demoralising effect on the enemy and were routinely used in conjunction with small arms in ambushes, or deployed independently. Both anti-personnel and anti-tank mines struck fear into the hearts of the enemy and diminished both his motivation and capacity to fight. We were taught how to use different types of explosives. We also learned to identify and de-fuse enemy bombs and other explosive materials, and how to conceal and prevent our own explosive materials being detected.

Comrade Zhepe Chibende, and later Comrade Chapewa Masande, were my tutors in this exciting speciality. Both had wonderful delivery skills and at times made daring and dangerous experiments with explosives. I was shocked, though not totally surprised, when I learned two years later that Comrade Chibende had been killed due to a premature detonation while demonstrating the use of explosives to his class.

Soon after my specialisation I was deployed to participate in the long awaited operations against the formidable Rhodesian forces. The enemy was superior in numbers, better trained and better equipped. In its eyes we were a rag tag guerrilla force that could not successfully threaten or overcome the might of the Rhodesian forces, supported by the equally formidable forces of the apartheid regime in South Africa and other capitalist countries. Nevertheless, we were undaunted by the advantages the enemy had over us. Our superiority lay in our conviction that our struggle was for a just cause, deserving a commitment from all of us to pay the supreme sacrifice, if need be, for the freedom and independence of our country, and to bring to an end the subjugation and suffering of our toiling masses.

After spending three months on operations I was recalled to be an assistant instructor (veteran) at Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters, after which I was promoted to be a member of General Staff (GS) and appointed as an instructor. This, of course, allowed me the opportunity to look at training from both the angle of the receiver (recruit) and that of the giver (instructor).

As a recruit I had considered training to be tortuous and cruel and the veterans inhumane and barbaric. That negative perception began to change after completion of basic training when the veterans began showing a more genial attitude towards the graduates. When I became an instructor, and with the little exposure I had had at the battlefield, I began to appreciate the need for a rigorous training regimen in preparing the recruits for even tougher operational demands.

Being appointed a member of GS had lots of advantages. You were immediately moved from the barracks and into a hut just dedicated to you. You were also assigned the services of two batmen to maintain the cleanliness of your hut and to provide for your other needs. Other advantages included an allowance which you could use to buy cigarettes, beers or supplementary food.

At least once every week, members of GS would nominate one of their own to go to the town of Chimoio to buy their requirements. On one Saturday morning it became my turn to go on such an errand. The only available transport on this day was a seven ton Mercedes Benz truck. Accompanied by one of my batmen and another comrade, we were driven to Chimoio town to buy cigarettes and a few other grocery items. When we got there we discovered it was a Mozambican holiday and almost all shops were closed. The few open ones did not have cigarettes in stock.

I was disappointed and directed that we drive back to our base. But our driver came to my rescue and explained that there was a prison complex nearby where cigarettes were sold, and they never ran out of stock. I was relieved to get this information and ordered that we drive straight to the prison.

We arrived and parked next to the entrance. I went to the gate and banged my fist on it to attract the attention of a prison guard. Without delay the gate was partially opened, just to allow the prison guard to see who had banged on it. I explained my wish to buy cigarettes and the prison guard opened the gate sufficiently to allow me to enter. All the comrades accompanying me remained in the truck to await my return.

Inside the prison I waited about fifteen minutes, expecting someone would come to serve me. There was no sign of that. I decided it was time to remind the guards that I was waiting to be served. The guard I spoke to had a whispered conversation with his colleague before turning his attention to me.

“Who told you that cigarettes are bought in a prison?” he enquired. I was surprised and irritated by the question.

“My colleague told me that on occasions our comrades come to buy cigarettes here,” I responded. The guard seemed to ignore my answer and a few minutes later his colleague, who had briefly disappeared, returned holding some prison clothing. The clothes were thrown at me and I was ordered to change into prisoners’ uniform.

My protests were in vain and the guards reinforced their numbers to force me to change my clothing. Reluctantly I did so. Meanwhile, after a prolonged delay, my colleagues outside banged on the prison gate to enquire when I would come out. To their utter surprise they were told no one resembling their description of me had entered the prison complex that day. When finally dusk came they had no option but to return to our base and report my mysterious disappearance.

Late on Sunday morning some officers were dispatched to the prison to secure my release. Again, they were told that I had never been there. To prove that they were telling the truth, the prison officials ordered all the prisoners to assemble and my comrades were asked if they could identify me. When they could not, the prison guards suggested that maybe my colleagues were mistaken about the prison where they had taken me.

The officers who had come to seek my release began to suspect foul play on the part of the comrades who had accompanied me to Chimoio the previous day. It was true I was not at the prison complex when my fellow officers came. Early that Sunday morning I had been transferred to a police holding cell and for the next five days was moved from one cell to another. On the fifth day, two days after I had begun a hunger strike to protest my detention, I was released without charge or explanation.

Among my trainees were two senior members of ZANU (PF), Comrade Herbert Ushewokunze* and Comrade Sydney Sekeramayi.† I was their instructor in political orientation classes and for sub-machine guns. This period of training cemented a special and enduring relationship between me and the two members of the Central Committee.

Later in this book I shall describe the attack by the Rhodesians targeting Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters in November 1977.‡ By then I was the acting Director of Politics and was involved in rewriting our political lessons. After surviving the attack, my team relocated to a new base called Mudzingadzi to continue our rewrite of the political lessons. While in this

process, Comrade Rex Nhongo[§] accompanied by four other comrades interrupted what we were doing and announced, “*Co-co-comrade T-Tekere na Co-comrade Ushewoku-kunze vasungwa*” (Comrade Tekere and Comrade Ushewokunze have been abducted) in his characteristic stammer. The troubled expression on his face bore witness to the seriousness of his words.

Without delay we took our guns and followed Comrade Nhongo in the direction of Takawira 2 Training Base where the purported abductors had headed. About three kilometres from the camp we heard the sound of a car coming from the direction of the camp and took up positions by a Mozambican primary school. With weapons ready, we waved the culprits down and made them disembark. After a quick but thorough interrogation we were given the location in the forest where Comrades Tekere and Ushewokunze had been gagged and tied to a tree. We were thus able to free them, ruffled but unharmed.

My relationship with Comrade Ushewokunze endured after independence. Comrade Ushewokunze accompanied me to my wife’s rural home where he acted as go-between in negotiations with my inlaws over the payment of *lobola* (dowry) and represented my father when our marriage was officially registered. When Comrade Ushewokunze was a government minister I used to visit him at his house in Glen Lorne, a low density suburb in Harare. On one such visit, just after he had been dropped from government in a cabinet reshuffle, I went to his house to commiserate with him. I had just said goodbye and was about to leave his house when the late Chief Rekayi Tangwena arrived. He also commiserated with Comrade Ushewokunze and advised him that if he were to form his own political party, he would command a lot of support and that he, too, was willing to give his support. I was concerned by this suggestion and delayed my departure until everyone had left, in order to offer my own advice. Once we were alone, I appealed to Comrade Ushewokunze not to be rash in his reactions but to remain a loyal party cadre, respectful of judgments made by superior authorities. Thank God he listened and it was not long before he bounced back into government.

My highest point as an instructor came when I was tasked by our Chief of Operations, Comrade Rex Nhongo, to train a commando group. I had no idea what such training would entail, so the first responsibility was to identify a team of competent officers to assist me in fulfilling this onerous

task. Amongst those I chose were comrades Oliver Shiri, Maspara, Mbumburu and Zitterson Zuluka.

Together with my team we designed the type of training we were to give to the commando group. It had to be something out of the ordinary, easily distinguishable from the conventional training given to all our fighters. We paid particular attention to the physique of the group, their discipline, and their ability to adapt to new challenges. As individuals and as a group they had to be able to operate and survive in a hostile environment, and they had to have excellent map reading skills. We were not told, but we knew they were being prepared for a special mission. Failure on their part to accomplish a given mission would reflect negatively on the quality of training they got and, by inference, the quality of their instructors. Because I had been selected to design and lead the commando training, any failure to successfully accomplish missions by the commando group would be a serious indictment on my capabilities.

We chose a location in the middle of a game reserve, far removed from population centres, to be the training ground for the commando group. The forty recruits were carefully selected from cadres who had completed their basic training in guerrilla warfare and had excelled over others in training and were in good physical shape.

There were to be no barracks or pit toilets, indispensable components of all our camps. No fires were allowed in the camp after sunset and strict silence was observed during the evenings. We tried the best we could to recreate conditions which the cadres would be expected to operate under at the home front. No boundaries, real or imagined, existed in our camp, and the natural vegetation was preserved the best we could. Littering of any kind was a punishable offense.

We were lavish with our punishments. Just to throw away a piece of paper or an empty ration tin, or drop a bullet, and so on, could earn one of our less severe penalties – running up and down a hill without stopping, carrying a five kilo stone. Failure to accomplish this could trigger other and more severe penalties. When on operations, it is these seemingly insignificant things that can give away one's presence to the enemy.

The actual training introduced new and advanced skills not taught in regular guerrilla training. The commando group learned to de-buss from moving trucks with guns blazing. They acquired a thorough knowledge of tracking skills which, together with the chameleon skills of camouflage and

concealment, turned them into an invisible rebel force against the Rhodesian regime.

The terrain which they traversed became the main source of their operational intelligence. They were trained to glean intelligence from foot prints and other disturbances on the ground, and to determine how long ago they could have occurred. The foliage too was an important source of intelligence. If there were bent or broken twigs or grass, they needed to decipher whether they were caused by animals or humans, which direction the animal or human was going, whether they were broken in a rushed or casual movement, and the approximate time the damage occurred, as well as the numbers involved.

Interpreting accurately the reactions of birds and animals and the different sounds and warnings they make when sensing lurking danger, or just communicating with each other, needed special training and expert observation. Mastering such skills turns birds and animals into useful and dependable allies against an enemy. We thus taught our cadres to be friends of, and friendly with, their environment.

The environment can be the bush with its plants, animals, birds and rivers; or an urban centre with its buildings, people, vehicles, roads, etc.; or the rural kind with its villages, people, cattle, dogs, paths, etc. Whatever its configuration, the environment had to be utilised to protect and conceal every movement from the prying eyes of the enemy, to warn of imminent danger, and to secretly lead to the enemy. We trained our cadres to use the environment to their advantage to spring surprise attacks against the enemy.

But the environment can also be like a tame ass. Friend or foe alike can ride it without resistance. Being at one with the environment does not preclude the enemy from being the same. The cadres had to be alert and vigilant at all times in order to outwit the enemy.

The cumulative effect of the different training programmes and the regimen of punishments, helped mould a disciplined, hardened and resilient commando fighting force, capable of adapting to different operational environments, as well as to seemingly insurmountable challenges and obstacles. We produced a resilient, better-qualified force than its trainers.

About four months after training the commando group I was in Ethiopia after redeployment, as the Chief Representative of ZANU, when news of the attack on oil tanks in Salisbury* broke. This brazen attack bore the

hallmarks of an operation by a commando group, such as the one we had trained.

* In Chimurenga parlance the term sub-machine gun was used interchangeably for a variety of automatic and semi-automatic weapons.

* Wilfred Mhanda was known as Dzinashhe Machingura during the struggle. He was the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) deputy political commissar from 1975 to 1977. He was arrested for his role in the ZIPA rebellion of 1977.

* Mapinduzi was a training base named after a ship that brought comrades who trained in Tanzania to Mozambique.

† Dr Samuel Tichafa Parirenyatwa became the Vice President of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) when it was formed in 1962. He was killed later the same year in a car 'accident,' believed to have been engineered by the colonial government, at a railway crossing.

* After independence, Comrade Herbert Ushewokunze held various ministerial appointments including Health, Home Affairs, Transport, Political Affairs and Energy, Water Resources and Development. He was also a member of the Central Committee and Politburo for the ruling party ZANU (PF), amongst his many achievements.

† At the time of writing, Comrade Sydney Sekeramayi is Minister of Defence, a post he previously held. Other ministerial posts he has held since independence include Lands Resettlement and Rural Development, Health, and State Security. He is a member of the Central Committee and Politburo for the ruling ZANU (PF), among other achievements.

‡ See *Chimoio Attack: Rhodesian Genocide* by the same author.

§ During the struggle, Comrade Rex Nhongo became the Chief of Operations and deputy to the Chief of Defence, Comrade Tongogara. After independence, Comrade Nhongo, whose real name was Solomon Mujuru, distinguished himself as Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). He was a member of the Central Committee and Politburo for the ruling ZANU (PF). Mujuru died on 16 August 2011 in an inferno on his farm in Beatrice.

* Salisbury, the capital city of Rhodesia, was renamed Harare after independence.

Chapter 5

THE SOUL OF THE REVOLUTION

Through superiority of arms you can defeat an ill-equipped adversary. But through superiority of arms you cannot defeat entrenched ideological beliefs. Superior weapons can determine the outcome of battles, but not necessarily define the final outcome of a war. Chimurenga Chekutanga (the first popular war of resistance – 1893 to 1896) was ruthlessly quashed by a better equipped colonial army. The inspirational leaders of that resistance, *mbuya* Nehanda and *sekuru* Kaguvi, among others, were captured and hanged. However, the victory of the colonialists was not sufficient to destroy the spirit or ideas that the heroes of the first war of resistance espoused and embodied. This can be borne out by the vindication of the prophetic words of *mbuya* Nehanda – “You have killed me, but my bones shall arise to inspire the struggle.” Almost seventy years after her death, her prophetic words inspired new generations to continue the struggle for which she and other heroes of the First Chimurenga had selflessly sacrificed their lives. What the colonialists had succeeded in doing was to destroy the visible flesh, but not the invisible spirit.

When Chimurenga Chechipiri (the second popular war of resistance) was launched in 1966 at the battle of Sinoia (now Chinhoyi), seven gallant ZANLA fighters lost their lives. Their courage and sacrifice was not in vain. The battle exposed the tactical inadequacy of relying too heavily upon arms, an area in which the colonists enjoyed overwhelming advantage over the guerrillas. Those of our early commanders, like Comrade Josiah Magama Tongogara, who went to train in guerrilla tactics in China, borrowed a lesson from the Chinese tactical concept of waging a successful guerrilla campaign which defined ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the people as a critical factor. An analogy of this new approach was to liken the relationship of the fighters and the masses to the relationship between fish and water. If one was to separate the fish (fighters) from the water (masses), the fish would, as an inevitable consequence, die.

After the launch of the Second Chimurenga, ZANU spent the next six years cultivating its relationship with the masses through a deliberate and purposeful programme of politicisation. A head-on confrontation with the enemy became subordinated to the political programme.

Politics was thus seen as the soul without which our armed struggle would find it difficult to succeed. For those who wanted to regard the gun as the sole instrument of bringing about freedom and independence, it was stressed that this was a fallacy. Indeed, when we opted for revolutionary armed struggle we had declared that independence grows out of the barrel of a gun. Through practical application of this doctrine, we realised that a revolutionary gun must be anchored on a political base.

A gun is a lifeless object that gains its life from the person using it. If a person using a gun has a criminal intent, then that gun will be used to commit criminal acts. Conversely, if the holder of a gun is enthused with revolutionary purpose, the life he breathes into the gun will fulfil a just purpose. Therefore, the very same gun can be used in the furtherance of a just cause, or to undermine justice, or to fulfil the two conflicting goals, depending on who breathes life into it at a given time. Comrade Mugabe aptly stated “the justice of our cause is the justice of our gun. Our fight is just because our cause is just. And because our cause is just, our fight is just.” There lay the difference between ours and the enemy’s fight. Whereas our cause was for justice and equality, that of the enemy was for the furtherance of the suppression and oppression of the majority by a tiny white minority.

Having recognized the essentiality of a people-driven and politically sanitised revolution, ZANLA infused political orientation into every phase and aspect of its struggle.

Whether one joined the liberation armed struggle through the route of a refugee camp, or went directly to a guerrilla training camp, it was imperative that everyone had to *crawl* before learning to *walk*. In other words, go through the process of purifying the mind before arming the body, in that order. Political orientation was definitively identified as the engine or soul without which the armed struggle would fail to take root and would founder.

Different approaches used to deliver the political message included slogans, songs, and political orientation classes. These were complemented by codes of discipline every comrade was expected to uphold and project.

Through the instrument of slogans we acclaimed our President, venerated those leaders who solidly supported our armed struggle, chastised our enemies, and expressed our hopes and aspirations. ‘Long live Comrade Mugabe’ and ‘Down with imperialism’ were common and popular slogans. We never, as a matter of policy, glorified through slogans any of our living comrades, irrespective of what position they held in the party (ZANU) or within the ranks of the fighting forces (ZANLA), except for our president. In the ‘Long live’ bracket were leaders like President Samora Machel, President Julius Nyerere, and Chairman Colonel Mengishtu Haile Mariam. The ‘Down with’ bracket lumped the likes of Smith and Botha, with whom we were locked in direct combat; Nyathi, a traitor who defected from our struggle and caused the deaths of hundreds of our comrades at Nyadzonya refugee camp; Sithole, Muzorewa, and Chirau – quislings and renegades who joined the Smith bandwagon in an internal settlement designed to derail and undermine the revolutionary armed struggle; and even Dr Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia, whom we accused of complicity in the assassination of Comrade Herbert Chitepo by the Rhodesian regime, and of using that assassination as a pretext for arresting the ZANU/ZANLA leadership on trumped up charges.

Wherever and whenever opportunity availed itself, slogans were routinely used until they became second nature to a guerrilla’s character and way of life. Just to approach a commander, whether he/she was in a group or alone, it was obligatory to announce your approach by the slogan ‘*Pamberi*’, meaning ‘forward’, and the commander or most senior commander in a group always responded, ‘*Ne-Chimurenga*’, meaning ‘with the struggle.’ Not to do this was an offence that attracted punishment. Also, wherever two or more comrades were gathered, they would know who was the most senior. When a more senior commander walked towards the group, the one most senior in the group would order the others to attention and salute the approaching senior commander.

Slogans were also used as evening passwords to differentiate friend from foe. At the last parade gathering of the day, the passwords for the approaching evening were disclosed. During the evening, the first to detect a movement issued a challenge, and the one challenged gave a response. Both the challenge and response had to correspond to the announced passwords for the evening. For instance one could challenge as follows, *Pasi* meaning, ‘Down’. The respondent would answer back or complete the

slogan, *naMuzorewa* meaning, ‘with Muzorewa,’ if those were the agreed passwords for the evening. Failure to give the correct response immediately triggered suspicion that the person challenged was an enemy intruder and, in such event, laid down precautionary measures had to be taken. The same passwords could not be used on two or more consecutive evenings.

Slogans were also used to teach right from wrong. If for instance you were caught stealing or selling donated goods, more often than not you would be lashed at the parade ground in front of everyone else. After flogging you were expected to shout slogans along these lines, ‘Forward with the struggle’... ‘Down with stealing.’ In making the slogans your countenance was not to betray anger or excessive pain, otherwise the punishment would be immediately repeated. The lesson to be learned was that any punishment meted out to comrades was not an act of barbarity but of love, intended to reform the recalcitrant comrades.

Songs were a dynamic means to entertain and educate our fighters and our masses; to express sorrow and anguish for our losses and misfortunes; to deride and belittle our foes; and to eulogise our brave masses, our leaders and those that supported our struggle, and our fallen heroes. Whatever objective the songs were meant to achieve, they all had an underlying and serious political message to impart. The effectiveness of songs as an educational tool could be equated with, and was complementary to, the use of slogans.

In the refugee and training camps, in the operational areas and wherever comrades were gathered, songs were a source of inspiration. Through songs, like our slogans, we paid tribute to our fallen heroes and expressed our abomination for traitors, renegades, and quislings. Our songs eulogised those who supported our struggle and we unequivocally proclaimed the kind of political system based on socialist principles we wanted to establish in a new Zimbabwe. We sang our condemnation and utter rejection of the capitalist/imperialist doctrine espoused and practised by the colonialists.

We sang about the high moral values we wanted our forces to uphold and be judged by. Above all, we sang our praise for Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe, our revered and principled leader who proved to be the undisputed inspiration of the ‘Second Chimurenga’.

The ‘Voice of Zimbabwe’ broadcast from Maputo was surreptitiously tuned to and proved immensely popular amongst our Zimbabwean masses. Through songs and commentaries we were able to highlight the iniquities of

the Rhodesian regime and to project a most favourable picture of our struggle and what it sought to achieve. Most of our songs took the tunes of church songs. Zimbabweans being a predominantly Christian society were endeared to the Christian-sounding revolutionary melodies. Through revolutionary songs our masses were guided to shun the machinations of the Rhodesian regime which wanted them to accept half-baked measures that gave the illusion of independence while retaining real power in the hands of the white minority.

When I was appointed Chief Representative of ZANU to Socialist Ethiopia, we began broadcasting radio messages and playing revolutionary songs from Addis Ababa on similar lines to the ‘Voice of Zimbabwe’ in Maputo. At the time of independence our broadcasts from Addis Ababa had a sizeable listenership, though not comparable to that enjoyed by our sister broadcasts in Maputo.

On the other hand, political orientation had a dominant impact on our liberation armed struggle and fell into four main categories – the pouring out of National Grievances, understanding the history of the Party, the study and countering of the changing enemy tactics, and viewing the struggle in the broader context of a class struggle.

To provide a firm foundation for revolutionary consciousness, the logical and preferred genesis of our political orientation was the deeper understanding of the national grievances. Our political commissars were skillfully trained to walk the cadres through the intricate maze of grievances against the settler regime that constituted the propelling reason for their decision to join the revolutionary armed struggle.

Whether one joined the armed struggle through forced recruitment or by one’s own volition, or even as a fugitive from justice, the bottom line was that the colonial regime was ultimately responsible for the resultant but courageous choice by each and every comrade or refugee, to opt for the armed struggle. Some of those who were thieves or murderers were driven to such extremities because the repressive regime in Rhodesia denied them education, employment and human dignity. Others, who through non-violent means tried to have the oppressive and segregated system of government reformed, were ruthlessly thrown into prisons or detention camps and even killed without any recourse to the tenets of natural justice or the protections of the international justice systems. Those who were born black were condemned to a life of servitude. Equally, those who were born

white were ordained into the earthly ‘Kingdom of Heaven’. The role of the settler regime was to ensure that the gulf between these destinies remained unbridgeable.

The cadres learned how through pieces of legislation and brute force the black majority were dispossessed of their land, denied access to areas reserved for whites, barred from a universal right to vote, and allowed limited educational opportunities, just enough to serve white interests. Every cadre was encouraged to recount his or her own grievances against the white settler regime led by Ian Douglas Smith.

Listening to the myriad examples of individual grievances against the Smith regime was like listening to confessions before the priest. After the recruits or refugees had bared themselves, the political commissars would assume the priestly role of pardoning all those who chose to join the armed struggle for any transgressions, no matter how grave or horrendous, including those committed against one’s own, as long as they were committed in colonial Rhodesia.

By the same token, all deaths resulting from natural causes or enemy action; deficiencies in supplies of food, clothing and medicines; any diseases or misfortunes occurring in all our bases, including refugee camps and operational areas; were all blamed on the Rhodesian regime.

After having been cleansed, one was expected to uphold high moral values and to follow a very strict code of discipline. The biblical *‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’* was strictly observed, to the extent that even pointing a wooden replica of a gun towards a comrade was regarded as a serious transgression.

All the comrades had a responsibility to articulate the National Grievances and to ensure that the masses understood that choosing to join the liberation armed struggle was not an act of adventurism or bravado, but a purposeful desire to rid our country of a repressive and cruel colonial monster for the betterment of every Zimbabwean.

In our orientation classes we highlighted the supremacy of the party (ZANU) over its military wing, ZANLA. We emphasised that it is politics that leads the gun, and not vice versa. It was thus necessary that all ZANLA cadres got an historical perspective about the evolution of politics in Rhodesia that led to the formation of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and what differentiated ZANU from other political parties.

Comrade President Mugabe was our mentor, political strategist and orator par excellence. His every speech and every interview shaped the direction of our political consciousness and became the resource pool of our political thinking. We saw the ugliness of capitalist exploitation through his eyes. We began to perceive things through his mind. The Mugabe that refused to be treated as a second class citizen, that showed courage in the face of adversities, and that was totally committed to the cause for freedom and justice for all, was born in every one of us. The rebel in him became the rebel in us.

The Soul of the Revolution thus drew inspiration from, and was nourished by, the thinking and teachings of the principled President of ZANU and Commander-in-Chief of ZANLA forces, Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe. I cannot do better in this chapter than sometimes giving a verbatim account of the teachings of my inspirational *guru*.*

In the history of our country we began by explaining how a Briton named Cecil John Rhodes is credited for his role in expanding British imperial influence to many parts of Africa. Rhodes succeeded in claiming for the British the territory that is present day Zimbabwe. Armed with a British royal charter, he hoisted the British flag on our soil on 12 September 1890. This flagrant act of aggression, the subsequent land grabbing, gold speculation and capital investment, imported into the country new dynamics of conflict that from the very outset created sharply antagonistic contradictions. In recognition of his colonial achievements the territory was named after him.

The trend had hardly begun towards the inevitable creation of a class structure when, firstly in 1893 the Ndebele people, and secondly in 1896 to 1897 the whole Shona/Ndebele community, rose up in arms to expel the enemy and liberate the fatherland. When in 1896 the settlers were on the verge of defeat, Britain hurriedly sent reinforcements to sustain its newly established colonial system, and our people suffered military defeat. British colonialism, through the settler community, had gained a new lease of life by usurping our people's right to sovereignty and independence.

The main objective of land occupation was economic. The capital sponsored bourgeoisie emerged economically, politically and socially as the dominant class above the oppressed and exploited working class. The creation of a new civil administration in the context of the establishment of a new political dispensation, based on the monopoly of power by the settler

community, the forcible acquisition of land by the settlers, and the entrepreneurial pursuits of mining, agriculture, trade and commerce, ushered in a matrix of antithetical relations. For ninety years, succeeding colonial administrations projected, protected and prolonged British interests by any means, including brute force and naked aggression.

Cadres were then taken back to the era of reformist politics in Rhodesia to show that struggles for national liberation can operate to defeat their own objectives, unless they are properly organised and properly led. The early nationalist movements, such as the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress and the British Voice Association, lacked, firstly, the sound basis of well-defined principles and objectives. Secondly, they lacked committed and courageous leadership. Thirdly, they had no effective methods of purposefully appealing to, and mobilising the masses; and fourthly they were devoid of a sound ideology. They were never a real link between the nationalist uprising of 1896-1897, which aimed at the overthrow of the then newly established British South Africa Company (BSAC) regime, for they aimed at the correction of wrongs by praying and appealing to the violent wrong-doer without either the means of violence or the intention to overthrow him.

The leaders of these organisations thus never really fully appreciated the demands of the situation, nor did they feel the same intensity of the burden resting on them as Nehanda and others felt in 1896. They felt overwhelmed by the national experience of defeat and subjection to the settler usurpers. They did what, within the limits of their comprehension and the circumstances of the moment, was possible. And yet, even that which they judged as possible translated itself into the impossible, and the grievances they had sought to remedy – such as land shortage, forcible ejection from acquired land, meagre wages, poor accommodation in industrial areas, etc. – received but little palliative correction. The major grievances went unheeded by the ruling white dynasty.

The struggles of other nations, such as those of the Congress Party of India (up to 1948), the Convention People's Party of Ghana (up to 1957), Algeria and Kenya, and the granting of independence to several African countries by 1962; plus the existence of well-organised and well-directed nationalist movements like the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of South Africa, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia and the Malawi Congress Party in

Malawi, did not go unnoticed. The Zimbabwean nationalists found ripe circumstances for the launching of an effective nationalist movement espousing well-defined principles and objectives and with a leadership at the time predominantly, though not wholly, clear-minded and courageous.

Thus, when the ANC was launched in 1957, there was an appreciable mobilisation of people in certain urban and rural areas of the country, but the approach was not very removed from remedial or reformist politics. However, with the creation of the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1960, the nationalist movement, for the first time in the country's history, fought for the change of system of government. The leadership of the NDP in their discharge of the burden of history, effectively mobilised people towards the acquisition of political power, and weaned them off the idea of seeking the mere correction of their grievances. They clearly stated their ultimate political objective as 'majority rule,' and thus organised strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, sit-ins and industrial sabotage in 1960–1961 in pursuance of this objective.

Like the ANC, the NDP failed to comprehend the requirements of the situation in terms of the correct method of struggle. Its resort to strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, etc., was not intended to overthrow the settler regime but rather to put pressure upon both the British government and the settler regime to democratise the parliamentary system and its franchise, leading to majority rule. Whilst this type of struggle succeeded in Malawi and Zambia, as indeed it did in Ghana and several other African countries, it just could not work in Rhodesia and South Africa where bigoted, racist, settler communities having acquired self rule, in respect of whites in Rhodesia in 1923, and independence in respect of South African whites in 1910, were pledged to wage armed resistance against any change undermining their position.

The realisation that an oppressive bourgeoisie that sustains itself and maintains its exploitative civil and socio-economic structures by armed force can only be overthrown by armed force employed as an instrument of the broad masses, had not dawned upon the NDP leadership and neither did it upon the leadership of ZAPU of 1961–1963. True, the burden of struggle yielded by history was felt. True, nationalist goals were clearly defined and on the basis of salient principles. True, the method of struggle was defined and pursued on the basis of sabotage and violence, though limited only to economic institutions and structures. True, cadres were sent for military

training. And yet, the immediate objective was never to overthrow settler imperialism by force, but rather to create persuasive pressures capable of making Britain act in convening a constitutional conference to negotiate an agreement based on majority rule.

ZANU, an offshoot from ZAPU, was born out of the realisation that negotiations, strikes and all other forms of protest and resistance pursued by preceding political parties could not speedily advance the cherished goal of independence on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The youthful and enlightened leadership of ZANU envisioned the gun as the instrument through which the aggressive and repugnant system of oppression by the settler colonial regime in Rhodesia could be annihilated, rather than reformed.

With the launching of the armed struggle by ZANU in April 1966, and also by ZAPU later that year, and the improvement in guerrilla warfare strategy and tactics by ZANU in 1972, there occurred a transformation in the evaluation of, not only the methods of struggle, but also in the appreciation that power could only transfer with the total overthrow of the enemy, or with the advent of his abject surrender.

In the orientation related to the history of ZANU, we highlighted the leadership structure of the party in order to explain and justify the decision to choose Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe as the logical successor to Ndabaningi Sithole, the first ZANU President, who was disowned by the fighting forces for reneging on the armed struggle. Since the Vice President of ZANU, Comrade Leopold Takawira, had died in enemy detention, the third most senior leader, according to the hierarchical pyramid of ZANU, was its Secretary General, Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe. It was logical, therefore, that he should fill the vacuum created by the suspension and consequent dismissal of Sithole from ZANU.

The next stage of our orientation involved the study of the psychological tactics the enemy used and refined in order to frustrate the successful execution of our struggle. It was intended, through this phase of orientation, that every possible ploy employed by the enemy in order to demoralise our forces and defeat our cause, be anticipated, identified and exposed, or countered by both our fighters and the masses at home. The orientation had to be responsive to the situation on the ground and quickly adapt to the changing enemy tactics.

Numerous attacks were conducted targeting guerrilla and refugee positions, both at home and in neighbouring countries, that provided sanctuary and bases for training and from which attacks against the regime in Rhodesia were launched. The attacks were aimed at neutralising guerrilla targets before deployment into operational areas could occur. They were also meant to induce a sense of insecurity and hopelessness in the minds of refugees and trainee fighters.

Inside Rhodesia itself, the masses were shepherded into concentration camps, called ‘Protected Villages*’, in order to break the *fish and water* relationship between the masses and the fighters. At the same time Selous Scouts[†] were used to impersonate our fighters and to commit atrocities against the masses with the objective of painting our forces with the brush of being real terrorists without regard for life and bent on terrorising innocent civilians.

When the above desperate measures failed to stem the tide of guerrilla successes, the regime attempted to court some within the ranks of ZANU or ZAPU, or their respective military wings, into denouncing the armed struggle or to cut deals with the regime so as to sow disunity within the ranks of those who had chosen armed struggle as the instrument for achieving freedom and independence. In this regard, lucrative offers of money and improved status were offered to those of our forces who opted out of the risky and hazardous life of struggle. When these inducements were largely rebuffed, the regime resorted to the use of various forms of poisoning, a practise proscribed by international conventions.

When I was appointed the Acting Director for Politics in ZANLA it was at a time when the so called ‘internal settlement’ – the charade that power was being transferred to the black majority – was switching into high gear. Every trick in the book was used to woo guerrillas and the masses alike into accepting the façade so skillfully engineered by the Rhodesians in concert with the British that gave the illusion of a power transfer. The reality on the ground was that power was merely being transferred from a white Smith to a black puppet Smith (Muzorewa) with the original Smith continuing to pull the strings. That could be no cause for celebration. Huge cash benefits, beautiful mansions (even in white residential areas), elegant and prestigious cars, etc. were being promised to those guerrillas who agreed to lay down arms.

As Director for Politics my urgent task, therefore, was to study and interpret the significance of all these developments and come up with a blueprint to counter the enemy's machinations.

The attack on our Headquarters at Chimoio on 23 November 1977 occurred when we were in the middle of designing such a blueprint. That task was continued and concluded on 4 June 1978, six and a half months after the attack.

The final phase of our political orientation was to view our revolutionary armed struggle in the broader context of a class struggle. This, in my view, was a defining phase but a phase which, at independence, had not been fully grasped by the majority of our fighters, and even less so by the masses. I shall qualify this assertion later in this chapter.

The British were not alone in their ambitions to colonise parts of Africa. The Portuguese had earlier, in the 16th and 17th centuries, sought without success to get a hold on what is present day Zimbabwe. Other European powers like the Dutch, French, Belgian and German imperialisms vied with each other for control of portions of Africa. Conflicting and coinciding interests by imperial powers led to the partitioning of Africa in 1884 at a conference held in Berlin in Germany. The parcelling out of Africa to competing imperial powers has, to this day, remained a curse that continues to haunt and threaten the sovereignty of African nations.

We saw our struggle, therefore, not in the context of a fight against a white minority regime led by Ian Douglas Smith, but a struggle against British colonialism, buttressed by other imperial forces. This explains why we refused to honor the authority of the minority regime in Rhodesia in our negotiations for independence. We saw it, and quite rightly too, as a mere extension of British colonialism. We were vindicated when the British assumed their colonial responsibility, and rejoiced when they lowered their flag as we hoisted ours in victory and celebration. The sun had finally set on the British colony and the colonial demon was exorcised from our land, or so we thought.

Thus, at the time we were waging our armed struggle, the world was split into two distinct and antagonistic camps – the capitalist and socialist camps. Because the capitalist forces were united and openly arraigned against us, we naturally gravitated towards the socialist camp. We embraced the socialist doctrine and got the bulk of our support from socialist countries.

We adopted scientific socialism based on Marxist-Leninist principles as our ideological bedrock. In our orientation we highlighted the nobility of socialist principles that projected a human face towards the marginalised and disadvantaged. The two cardinal socialist principles ‘an equal amount of products for an equal amount of labour’ and ‘for he who does not work neither shall he eat’ resonated well within our struggle, in contrast to the capitalist philosophy that favoured the colour of the skin rather than one’s labour input. We looked at socialism as a transitory stage towards a perfect communist state in which everyone invested their labour ‘to the best of their ability’ and got rewarded ‘according to their individual needs.’ This presupposed the highest stage of human consciousness and development. A stage where a doctor, for example, will exert maximum effort to deliver good service in the same way a house cleaner equally exerts maximum effort to deliver good service, specific to his/her professional competence. Therefore, because both the doctor and cleaner fully commit themselves to provide the best of their professional competencies, they must both be rewarded according to their needs. In other words, if the needs of a doctor coincide with those of a cleaner, they will be rewarded the same.

We contrasted the socialist principles against the capitalist principles that exalt the exploitation of man by man. We highlighted how the colonialists, being avowed capitalists, had constituted themselves into a bourgeois or aristocratic class that condemned and trampled with impunity the black race.

In our orientation we challenged, rejected and unequivocally condemned the notion of a superior race, which is a euphemism that the black race is cursed to be inferior in perpetuity. We cited examples of blacks who have excelled in life, better than the whites, such as Comrade Herbert Chitepo, the first black barrister in Rhodesia, and President Mugabe, who holds six academic degrees and some honorary degrees.

Political orientation was largely, but not totally, successful in achieving the goals we had set for ourselves during the struggle. Our biggest success was in the battle to win the hearts and minds of the people, thereby galvanising support for the successful execution of the struggle. The results of the first post-colonial elections (1980) bear testimony to this. Through political orientation, comrades were transformed into a politically conscious fighting force driven by, and committed to, a just cause. Their full grasp of the national grievances and ability to articulate them in simple and easy to

understand language, helped cement the ‘fish and water’ relationship between them and the masses in Rhodesia. Both the fighters and the masses remained unshakeable in their resolve for freedom and independence, even when subjected to the most brutal treatment and persecution by the Rhodesian regime.

That ZANU was able to eclipse the advantage deriving from incumbency that the puppet Muzorewa regime enjoyed, and the spirited campaign of the only other party engaged in the armed struggle, ZAPU, speaks volumes about the success and effectiveness of the ZANU political programme.

Our least achievement was in the last phase of our political orientation. At the time of independence, not many of the fighting forces had an opportunity to have an in depth study of both the capitalist and socialist philosophies. What we had succeeded in doing was to paint a romantic and idealistic picture of socialism, but without the critical analysis of how both internal and external factors would affect its application. Indeed, we saw capitalism as an evil, but never fully appreciated how difficult it would be to fight such evil. In hindsight, we did not realise that many of us would, after independence, embrace and perpetuate that same evil we were fighting against.

I was one of the few who seriously studied the literature on capitalism and imperialism on the one hand, and socialism and communism on the other. Socialism made a very strong appeal then, as it still does today. I was convinced then, as I am convinced today, that the bourgeoisie,* with their insatiable appetite for wealth, are the cause of social tensions within societies and hence the cause of the inequitable distribution of wealth among nations.

As for the ZANLA forces in the camps and battlefield, the socialist gospel was easy to embrace. They had no wealth to distribute and therefore nothing to lose. But, for some of our political leaders and ZANU supporters, especially those living in capitalist countries, they emulated the glamorous lifestyles of the wealthy. The inevitability of Zimbabwe’s independence through the heroic efforts and commitment of the liberation forces was not lost on them. Therefore, whilst espousing socialism in order to ingratiate themselves with the fighting forces, their hearts and souls remained capitalist. Indeed, many were old enough to join the struggle but shunned doing so because they shared the same ideology with those we were fighting. Even worse, they considered the armed struggle a hazardous

expedition which only the uneducated should venture into. Whilst comrades sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Zimbabwe, they chose to improve their education and amass wealth so that they could be better positioned when Zimbabwe attained independence.

The capitalists saw the opportunity cost presented by these pseudo revolutionaries who shouted ZANU slogans the loudest, and prepared them for a counter revolutionary role aimed at promoting and protecting colonial interests, while negating and undermining the gains of the revolutionary armed struggle. The comrades who had so successfully mobilised the masses to support the armed struggle and were instrumental in ZANU's resounding victory at the first democratic elections in 1980, those same comrades who were willing to sacrifice their lives for freedom and independence were now seen as uneducated and therefore unable to hold positions of authority in government.

It is a shame that many of those selfless comrades live in abject poverty today, only to be acclaimed as heroes when they die. If indeed they are our heroes, why can't we treat them as such while they are still living? Couldn't we have adopted a policy that all comrades who participated in the armed struggle be assisted by the state to acquire university qualifications? Surely we would then have in positions of authority many with the vision and clarity of thought and discipline such as we had during our struggle.

Let me be a voice in the wilderness, but is it not a shame that many years after independence we still teach Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, etc. but no meaningful account of our glorious struggle for independence? Who is blocking such entry of our history into the school curriculum? What value do we as a nation derive from teaching our youths the literature and values of those we fought and vanquished?

Fortuitously, the uniformed forces that many regarded as a convenient assemblage of the uneducated freedom fighters, have proven the cynics wrong. Not only have they excelled in their educational pursuits, but most importantly they have remained loyal, resolute and disciplined in safeguarding the gains and ideals of the liberation struggle.

For the many forsaken comrades in their rural homes, or roaming the cities unable to eke out a decent living, the revolutionary zeal that motivated them to cross the borders to join the armed struggle, and that spirit of selfless sacrifice that has turned them into unsung heroes, was never doused by the seeming neglect or lack of recognition. When they saw

the lethargy in the implementation of agrarian reforms that would lead to fairer land redistribution, they once again rose to the occasion and gave impetus towards its historic fulfilment. Again, many have not benefitted from this programme. Predictably too, the indigenisation gravy train shall pass them by. Let me take a long pause here to salute these heroes.

The nation has an obligation to take good care of our revolutionary heroes. They are the torch bearers of the ‘Soul of the Revolution’.

* *Zimbabwe News*, Vol 10, No. 2, May/June 1978.

* The ‘protected villages’ were camps into which the *masses* uprooted from their homes were moved under the pretext that they were being protected from terrorist atrocities. The truth was that the Rhodesians wanted to isolate the guerrillas in the targeted areas from the people who provided them with food, clothing and intelligence.

† The Selous Scouts was a multiracial specialist psy-ops unit of the regular Rhodesian Army. Many of its members were ‘turned’ former guerrillas who assisted in the unit’s prime role of intelligence gathering and actively combating the freedom fighters, both inside and outside Rhodesia. They frequently masqueraded as genuine comrades in order to penetrate guerrilla groups and camps.

* According to Marxist theory, a middle class that owns the means of producing wealth and exploits the working class.

Chapter 6

STATES IN THE FRONTLINE OF ZIMBABWE'S STRUGGLE

Of the four countries contiguous with Rhodesia, Zambia was the first to attain independence in 1964. From the ZANLA standpoint, Zambia was both a blessing and a curse, in that order.

Colonial history in many respects twinned the two neighbours – both were colonised by the British and were like two provinces of the same country, one being Southern Rhodesia and the other Northern Rhodesia. Their ‘oneness’ appeared settled when in 1953 the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed. Rhodesia stood for both present day Zambia and Zimbabwe, and Nyasaland for present day Malawi. With the demise of the Federation in 1963, Rhodesia drifted back to its ‘two nation’ status of Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia, and then to Rhodesia and Zambia when Northern Rhodesia attained independence the following year and changed its name to Zambia.

As far back as the formative years of the Federation, many black Rhodesians fled the repression in their country and crossed into the then Northern Rhodesia to live, work or study there. It is from these immigrants that the first crop of ZANLA guerrilla commanders was harvested. Amongst these were Comrades Josiah Magama Tongogara, who became the Chief of Defence of the ZANLA forces; Emmerson Mnangagwa, Sheba Gava, and many others.

However, Zambia was prone to imperialist manipulations. The close personal relationship between President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Comrade Joshua Nkomo, the leader of ZAPU, was instrumental in shaping the sour relations that developed between ZANU and the Zambian leadership. The distinction between Zambian people and Zambian leadership is important to understand. Whereas the Zambian people were committed to our struggle, irrespective of who led that struggle, the leadership discriminated against ZANU. Dr Kenneth David Kaunda worked assiduously to unite ZANU and ZAPU, but only under the leadership of Dr

Joshua Nkomo. ZANLA cadres were suspicious of Dr Nkomo's leadership credentials and felt he would compromise the execution of the armed struggle in favour of half baked solutions and compromises unrepresentative of popular African opinion.

Unable to change the mindset of ZANLA cadres into accepting the leadership of Dr Joshua Nkomo, President Kaunda employed tactics, fair or foul, to arm-twist them into compliance. It is in this regard that ZANU believed that Dr Kaunda exploited the assassination of Comrade Herbert Chitepo by the Rhodesian forces as a pretext for arresting the ZANU/ZANLA leadership. He saw this leadership as the obstacle to unity which, if sidelined or liquidated, would leave the leaderless ZANLA forces with no option but to accept the leadership of Comrade Joshua Nkomo. Initially the strategy appeared to work, with the formation of the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) which brought ZANLA and ZIPRA under a unified military command (see page 271 in appendices). In a later chapter I shall examine in depth how this 'unity' unravelled.

The launch of *Chimurenga Chechipiri* by ZANLA in 1966 was from Zambian soil. Further incursions for purposes of politicisation of the masses, or sabotage missions, followed. The Zambezi River formed a natural obstacle for crossings by freedom fighters. Secret crossing points were identified, but later some were compromised. Suspicion once again fell on some Zambian officials for selling out to the Rhodesian forces.

The period between 1973 and 1975 was a most trying time that threatened to undermine the execution of the armed struggle. Zambia colluded with the British and Americans in supporting a détente exercise that favoured negotiations over fighting. This was the period that saw ZANLA incursions from Zambian soil into Rhodesia grinding to a halt. Fortunately for ZANU, the end of the détente period coincided with the birth of a new independent nation of Mozambique (25 June 1975) which opened its borders to enable ZANLA incursions into Rhodesia.

Zambia ceased to act as a front for ZANLA operations, but continued to welcome and allow ZIPRA operations from its soil. Nevertheless, politically and diplomatically, especially under the ambit of the Frontline States, Zambia continued to play a complementary and vital role in Rhodesia's decolonisation process.

In the final stages of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique, ZANLA forces fought side by side with their FRELIMO

comrades against the Portuguese. And in the final stages of the struggle against British colonialism in Zimbabwe, FRELIMO forces fought side by side with their ZANLA comrades against the Rhodesian forces. This sums up the birth and consolidation of a relationship that saw Mozambique become a key and critical ally of ZANU in the fight against the Rhodesian regime, a relationship that has withstood the test of time.

Mozambique provided bases for thousands of Zimbabwean refugees, training camps for freedom fighters, forward bases for fighters trained inside or outside Mozambique, and innumerable crossing points for operations against the Rhodesian regime through its long and porous border.

Mozambique's efforts for the independence of Zimbabwe were not without penalties. Without heed to international protestations, the Rhodesian forces made incursions into Mozambique to massacre Rhodesian refugees and ordinary Mozambicans. They also targeted the country's economic infrastructure and sought to neutralise guerrilla bases located inside Mozambique. Through it all, the Mozambican people, led by their courageous and visionary leader, President Samora Machel, remained resolute in their support for the Zimbabwean struggle.

In the early stages of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) had closer ties with ZAPU than with ZANU. The special affinity ZAPU and FRELIMO had for each other derived largely from the fact that both were allied to the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), while ZANU was allied to the Chinese. That distinction was critical to the evolution of relations amongst liberation movements in Africa. Russia put heavy pressure on its satellite states not to accord recognition or provide military support to liberation movements affiliated to the Chinese, in order to coerce them to switch allegiances. The term 'authentic six' was used to distinguish those liberation movements in sub Saharan Africa which the Russians considered as belonging in their sphere of influence. These were; MPLA of Angola, PAIGC of Guinea and Cape Verde, FRELIMO of Mozambique, SWAPO of Namibia, ANC of South Africa, and ZAPU of Zimbabwe.

Given the above, how was it that in the end FRELIMO gravitated towards and became such a close ally of ZANU? The answer lies in ZANU's demonstrated commitment to wage the armed struggle, compared with ZAPU's antipathy towards committing fully its forces in the fight against the colonial regime. Within ZANU, the widely held view was that

ZAPU was pursuing the ‘zero’ option. By this option, ZAPU would let ZANU expend its forces and military hardware in fighting the enemy, but when the enemy was on the verge of collapse or surrender, ZAPU with its tanks and other heavy artillery, as well as a regular trained force, would drive into the capital to declare and secure the resultant new government.

Botswana became independent in 1966. Its border with Rhodesia was porous, unlike the border separating Rhodesia from Zambia which had the Zambezi River as a natural obstacle. Besides sharing a border with Rhodesia, Botswana also shared a border with South Africa and its economy was heavily dependent on South Africa.

Many early recruits for the struggle, especially before Mozambique became independent, used Botswana to transit to Zambia. For a country with a tiny population and a correspondingly small police force, rather than an army, Botswana was in a difficult position. Except for the small area where it touches Zambia, it was surrounded by powerful and edgy colonial neighbours, all engulfed by the flames of revolution; Rhodesia under a settler colonial regime to the east, apartheid South Africa to the south, South West Africa (Namibia) to the west, and Portuguese West Africa (Angola) to the north (separated only by a tiny strip of land, the Caprivi Strip). It was too much to expect Botswana to provide guerrilla training camps or to act as a spring board for guerrilla attacks against the white settlers in Rhodesia. The best it could do was to establish refugee camps in conformity with international norms and practice and to turn a blind eye to guerrilla recruits who used its territory to transit to Zambia and beyond for training.

Under the umbrella of the Frontline States and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Botswana played its political and diplomatic role in seeking a solution to the colonial crisis in Rhodesia. But the matrimonial ties President Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana had with the British eroded any trust and confidence ZANU might have had regarding Botswana’s concrete commitment to rendering assistance to Zimbabwe’s armed struggle. Botswana’s territory could not be used, with its acquiescence, as a springboard to mount attacks against the Rhodesian regime.

The country which made the most pronounced contribution to the liberation struggles in Southern Africa as a whole is Tanzania. The personal commitment shown by Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the President of Tanzania, for the total liberation of the African continent, was eloquently

demonstrated by the provision of training camps for all the Southern African liberation movements. Nachingwea and Mgagao are household names for many liberation movements like FRELIMO and ZANLA. These military training camps were the crucibles from which thousands of ZANLA fighters were poured out.

In the context of Zimbabwe, or even Namibia and South Africa, Tanzania provided a safe haven for guerrilla training because it did not share borders with any of these countries. In recognition of its immense contribution to the African struggles, the Organization of African Unity's Liberation Committee was headquartered in Tanzania and headed for most of its existence by a Tanzanian military officer, Colonel Mbita (now a retired Brigadier General). The Liberation Committee was the conduit through which assistance to the liberation forces could be channeled.

On the political and diplomatic front, President Nyerere's maturity, towering presence, and grasp of issues, helped to keep African leaders in check and committed to the demands for a genuine decolonisation process. His stature as an African statesman, and shrewd use of the Frontline States as an effective diplomatic tool, became powerful weapons for our liberation struggle.

Though not a Frontline State in the strict sense of the word, Socialist Ethiopia accomplished the role of a frontline state in terms of the contribution it made to our struggle. It gave military training to large numbers of both ZANLA and ZIPRA recruits and was prepared to train thousands more had the war not ended when it did. In addition to military training, Ethiopia trained cadres from both ZANU and ZAPU as pilots and aircraft maintenance technicians, as well as ground hostesses.

In a later chapter I shall devote some time to examining highlights of the ZANU representative office based in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

A number of other countries played a role, though to a lesser extent than those mentioned above, providing practical assistance in the form of military training, or provision of material assistance. Amongst these were Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, and even the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

As a continental body the OAU, steered by the Frontline States, supported our struggle and lobbied the international community to do the same. Throughout our struggle the OAU insisted that the two liberation organisations, ZANU and ZAPU, should unite and operate under the banner

of one party, one leader, and a unified fighting force. Some of the African countries wanted to make unity a precondition for continued support of our struggle.

Achieving unity between ZAPU and ZANU and their respective military wings was a mammoth task which remained unachievable until after independence. A chapter shall be devoted to ‘The Elusive Unity’ between ZANU/ZANLA and ZAPU/ZIPRA.

The struggle for our independence took place in the era of the Cold War that pitted the socialist camp, dominated by Russia and China, against the capitalist camp where the USA and Western Europe called the shots. Relations between the two ideologically opposed camps were largely antagonistic. Countries of the developing world, or third world countries, were regularly called upon to declare their allegiances.

Expectedly, there were divided loyalties. On the one hand, the socialist doctrine made sense to most of the developing world, but on the other, the long cultural and economic ties established through colonial conquest by the imperial powers were a fait accompli that could not be ignored. Third world countries adopted a policy of non-alignment, choosing to tread the difficult path of dealing with both blocks, but being formally aligned to neither. That is precisely what the Non-Aligned Movement came to represent. It is now fashionable to talk of a uni-polar world, or the world being a global village. Post colonial groupings such as the British Commonwealth, Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, and the Francophone States, have gained in strength and eminence and are a constant reminder of the nostalgic attachment some former colonies have for their former colonisers. The Non Aligned Movement largely remains an ineffective and moribund grouping of nations with different ideological persuasions and devoid of a unified position on global challenges.

The ZANU/ZANLA ideological persuasion during the struggle was unambiguously clear – Socialism on the basis of Marxist Leninist philosophy. We were thus aligned to the socialist camp and antagonistic to the capitalist block. Therefore, we developed very close ties with almost all socialist countries.

Most outstanding amongst the socialist countries were Russia, China, Romania, Yugoslavia, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam. They trained and armed our forces and also offered training in identified non military courses. The socialist countries were unwavering in their support of our

struggle. It is no exaggeration at all to say most socialist countries were in the frontline of Zimbabwe's struggle for independence.

Chapter 7

OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENTS

Between 1976 and 1978 I had a number of engagements against enemy forces inside Rhodesia and one significant encounter inside Mozambique. In this chapter I shall highlight my first and last operational deployments inside Rhodesia. The only engagement I had with the Rhodesian forces inside Mozambique shall be dealt with separately as a seminal chapter from my book ‘Chimoio Attack – Rhodesian Genocide’.

After completing my specialisation course in engineering in May 1976 I was appointed an assistant instructor under the supervision of an instructor who was a Member of the General Staff. When the first group of recruits I supervised in training concluded their basic training in guerrilla warfare around September 1976, my first opportunity for operational deployment presented itself. Operational commanders who had been promised reinforcements came to collect their fighters. The commander for Nehanda sector needed medical attention that might take up to a few weeks before he could be cleared to return to his operational area. It was decided that one of the assistant instructors, or veterans as we were referred to, be placed in command of a forty five member platoon that was allocated for deployment there. I happened to be the only one who knew the area well.

I was given my orders and the next two days were spent checking and ensuring the state of readiness of my troops. They were all kitted out with personal weapons that included AK-47s, hand grenades, bazookas – the Russian RPG-7s and Chinese RPG-2s – and 82 and 60mm mortars and their corresponding mortar bombs. Additionally, we were to carry ammunition reserves and anti tank and anti personnel mines. I then spent considerable time with the sector commander being briefed on how we were to penetrate the operational area and how we were to link up with other comrades deployed there. My deployment was to last not more than a month, after which I was to return and continue being an assistant instructor. While I would have preferred to have been deployed in Rhodesia for a much longer

period, the prospect of my first deployment nevertheless filled me with great delight and would test my command capabilities.

On D-Day we were trucked northwards to begin our mission from a forward base in Tete province, just opposite Mukumbura in Rhodesia and about five kilometres from the border. As we crossed from Mozambique into Rhodesia, the excitement that had accompanied us up to the border was replaced by anxiety about what the first contact with the enemy would be like.

Our movements were mostly under cover of darkness, with rests during the day to avoid enemy detection. As we moved deeper inside Rhodesia, the freedom to speak loudly to each other was greatly curtailed lest the enemy should detect our presence. The efficiency with which this discipline was upheld and tolerated accentuated the degree of anxiety, or probably fear, that held my whole platoon captive. In fact, without being directed to do so, my platoon had replaced vocal communication with sign language, except in instances where speaking was unavoidable.

To ensure we remained on the right course to the target area, we had to align our direction to certain distinctive land marks like mountain peaks, large rivers, roads, and identifiable population areas.

It took us five days to get to our sector of operations. Every one of the comrades carried the standard personal issue – an AK-47 and webbing containing several hundred rounds of ammunition around the waist. In addition, we had four mortars and forty mortar bombs, two heavy machineguns, four light machineguns and cases of spare ammunition, which the platoon had to take turns in carrying. The three section commanders and I also had pistols.

During the time it took us to reach our sector of operations, night navigation proved a taxing experience. Visibility was very poor and limited to about eight metres, as the nights were dark and there was no moon. My ‘good knowledge’ of the area was mostly restricted to knowing the roads I had driven through in the past and the settlement areas I had once visited. In our march to the target area we avoided using the roads, for obvious reasons, and whatever landmarks I knew and relied upon were swallowed by darkness. We moved in single file, maintaining a gap of about five metres between each fighter. One could see only the comrade immediately ahead or the one immediately behind.

On several occasions in the darkest hours before dawn, a comrade would doze and veer off course. All those behind would blindly follow him on this wrong course. Sometimes, bringing the fighters back on course could take anything between one and two hours. The munitions that we carried were too heavy and stretched the platoon's energy reserves to the limit. Each step taken up the mountains, down the steep slopes, along the valleys and across the plains, caused much physical pain and eroded the desire and confidence to confront the enemy.

During the day while we rested, we re-oriented our position and activated the *mujibha/chibwido* network as explained by the sector commander in his brief at the time I assumed command of the platoon. Through these essential contacts our platoon received adequate supplies of food and much valuable information about enemy movements and locations. This was clear testimony of the effectiveness of the ZANLA political orientation in forging a 'fish and water' relationship with the masses. These essential and welcome contacts with the masses helped to revive the sagging spirits of the combatants, but at the same time created a security risk as it was possible for the enemy to observe the increased activity between villagers and a particular section of the forest. Furthermore, there could be enemy informers amongst the civilian population.

On the second evening after crossing the border, misfortune struck. We were walking parallel to a deep gorge a few metres to our right at around 3.30 am when one of the comrades began to doze and veered off course. In full view of the comrade right behind him, he suddenly disappeared, swallowed by the ground beneath. Momentarily, the witness to this strange occurrence was immobilised by fear and superstition. All along he had known that it was foolhardy to challenge the might of the white men, and now the platoon was cursed.

At the same time these thoughts were racing through his mind, a shriek of pain erupted from beneath the ground that had swallowed his colleague, and he knew he had to run away before the curse visited him too. He threw away the gun and ammunition he was carrying as their combined weight would rob him of the speed he badly needed to get away. He broke away from the line, turned to the right, and ran for his life. The waiting gorge swallowed him too! Two sharp shrieks inside one minute alerted all the other comrades that something was wrong.

As standard procedure, they all took up prone positions with their guns cocked and ready to fire. They remained in this position as the commanders investigated the incident.

When the investigation was over and all the facts were established, what caused greatest concern to the platoon was the practical problem of having two stretcher cases, one with a fractured leg and the other with a swollen ankle and suspected fracture of the collar bone – in addition to the punishing weight of the munitions.

Under the circumstances we decided we could not proceed further that evening and the platoon took up positions on the nearby mountainside. Having administered first aid to the two injured comrades during the night, it became clear when daylight broke that their condition required specialist attention that could only be provided by our rear bases in Mozambique. We enlisted the services of eight *mujibhas* to carry the two injured comrades back to Mozambique, and I detached six members from the platoon to provide them with protection on their way back.

The third evening passed without incident, but on the fourth night as we were approaching our sector of operations, disaster struck again. We had been walking for over six hours when the lead comrade tripped over a sleeping buck. The man and the animal panicked at the same time. The animal took three or four leaps, stopped, and timidly looked around to see what had invaded his home.

The man had instinctively taken a prone position and cocked his gun, convinced he had stumbled on an enemy position. When the animal momentarily stopped, the man believed that the enemy was preparing to fire at him and resolved that he should be the first to fire. A burst of automatic fire erupted. The animal knew it now needed survival more than a home, and ran down along the line of combatants. Wherever it came into view of the fighters, it ignited gunfire.

Before the animal reached the end of the line it decided to cut across it, but with tragic consequences for our forces. As the gunfire followed the animal it passed through the heart of a section commander who was trying to halt the firing. Death was swift and painless. Even for the inexperienced fighters, however, it was evident that we had betrayed our presence to the enemy.

After burying our comrade in a shallow but well-camouflaged grave, I ordered the platoon to go and occupy defensive positions on a mountain

slope about two kilometres away. As early as 6 am we were receiving a steady flow of information from our *mujibha* network about increased enemy activity around our position. By 7 am we could see the movement of some Rhodesian troops close to our position. It was about 8.20 am when the assault on our position began.

Judging by the volume of fire from my platoon, they had surely overcome their fear and were courageously confronting a much more seasoned force. On closer analysis of the effectiveness of our fire, I saw that about four comrades had not released their safety catches. They kept pressing their triggers, thinking that the sound of their colleagues' guns was that of their own. A few others buried their faces in the ground and had their bullets ricocheting from a nearby rock.

The majority of the platoon had their weapons aimed high above the positions of the enemy. It was only after I stood behind them and threatened that I would shoot anyone who did not aim at the enemy that their aiming improved and our fire became more effective.

After an exchange of gunfire lasting almost an hour, there was a lull in the fighting and to my joy we had suffered no casualties. Satisfied that there would be no further attacks that day I ordered my troops at around 1730 hours to prepare for the resumption of our march forward to our intended destination. Just then, two enemy planes appeared out of the blue and dropped bombs on our position before disappearing in the direction they had come from. We were left licking our wounds and burying two of our comrades. The stark realities of war were vividly and painfully brought home to us. We all now understood better what we already knew but had not put into proper context; this was not a kid's game of hide and seek but a dog eat dog contest.

Around 3.30 am of the fifth day we arrived in the Chawanda area, the same area I initially wanted to pass through to join the struggle inside the then Portuguese East Africa. That was the route my hero, Cuthbert, had told me to use in the hope of a chance encounter with comrades operating in the area.

Before leaving Mozambique on this mission the sector commander had cautioned me not to attempt on our own to establish contact with comrades operating in the area, as this could have disastrous consequences. Instead, I was given the name and description of a trusted civilian contact in the area that would organise our first encounter with other comrades. Leaving

behind the rest of my platoon in defensive positions on a hillside, I took two comrades with me to locate the hut in Chawanda business centre where the trusted contact lived. It did not take us long to positively identify the hut. About twenty metres away from it, I left my AK-47 with my comrades and ordered them to cover my approach to the hut. I was armed with a pistol hidden beneath my shirt.

Fortunately the contact was there. I quickly introduced myself and ordered him to dress and follow me. Back at our platoon position I tasked him to arrange for a contact with other comrades operating in the area and warned him of the consequences of betrayal. It took less than 24 hours for my platoon to be united with our detachment that operated in the area.

For the one month I remained deployed inside Rhodesia we had three skirmishes with Rhodesian soldiers that regularly patrolled the area. However, the crowning moment of my deployment was when a Rhodesian troop carrier drove over an anti-tank mine I had planted on the dirt road – with spectacular results.

My last operational deployment inside Rhodesia was in March 1978, a few months after the attack by the Rhodesians on our ZANLA Headquarters at Chimoio, inside Mozambique. I shall describe in greater depth that attack in my next chapter. I was appointed to be one of the commanders of a 450 strong force that, for the past few weeks had been preparing for an attack on a big but as yet undisclosed target. Of this large force, fifty were female combatants. The size and composition of the force was significant in two respects. Firstly, this was the biggest ever ZANLA force mobilised to go and attack a single target. Secondly and more significantly, this was the largest mobilisation of female combatants to be deployed in a combat role. In the past, female combatants were used in a supportive role, carrying arms and ammunition to ‘safe’ locations at the periphery of the operational areas. From these locations their male counterparts would replenish supplies, but never before had women been deployed so deeply into the operational areas.

The timing of the attack, coming barely four months after the simultaneous attacks on Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters and Tembwe Training Base by the Rhodesians, was intended to send a powerful message that our ability to deliver fatal blows against the enemy had not been diminished by those attacks. To the contrary, our resolve to crush the repugnant regime of Ian Douglas Smith and his three stooges – Bishop Abel

Muzorewa, Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and Chief Jeremia Chirau – had been strengthened and given added impetus.

A week before the mission was to begin, and in accordance with the directive from the Chief of Defence, Comrade Josiah Magama Tongogara, the Chief of ZANLA Operations, Comrade Rex Nhongo gathered the commanders who were selected to lead the operation. Amongst them, the most senior commander was Comrade Josiah Tungamirai.* Other members of the High Command included Comrade Tonderai Nyika, Comrade Ziso, Comrade Agnew Kambeu† and Comrade Dominic Chinenge. There were many members of General Staff, including Comrades Dragon Patiripakashata (the writer), John Walker, John Tekere, Sobhusa Gazi and Flint Magama.

The target was revealed to us as Umtali (now Mutare), the fourth largest town in Rhodesia and the provincial capital of Manicaland Province. A seven member team had just returned from a reconnaissance mission of the target and had been brought to brief us. Amongst them was Comrade Sobhusa Gazi.‡

From the border with Mozambique, the target lay within a 10 kilometre distance as the crow flies. Because of its proximity to Mozambique, a hostile country according to the Smith regime from where the main guerrilla movement operated, there was always heightened surveillance of the border area close to Umtali to thwart any attempts by ZANLA guerillas to spring attacks on the town. Brazen attacks had been successfully mounted against Ruda base about a year before the attack on Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters, and Grand Reef Airforce base about a month after the attack on Chimoio. Both these targets were in Manicaland and not very far from Umtali. Attacks on these heavily fortified bases proved our capacity and tenacious resolve to assault heavily guarded enemy bases. The Rhodesian regime knew that it was only a matter of time before a significant attack, such as the one we were contemplating, would be launched against major economic targets and population centres.

The reconnaissance team briefed us from a sketch map that showed enemy positions – military barracks, police camps, government buildings and industrial areas – as well as white and black residential areas, schools for white and black children, tourists' attraction centres and hotels they frequented. The briefing even went into details of the rural areas that surrounded Umtali, including the local leadership – the chiefs, headmen and

kraalheads. We even got to know who of these were sympathetic to the regime and who our staunch supporters were.

On a separate sketch diagram the reconnaissance group plotted the known static positions of the regime's forces guarding the border, the areas they patrolled and their routine. Most importantly, they plotted the positions they wanted us to occupy when attacking our target and the recommended routes to get there.

Under cover of darkness we were expected to deploy astride the Christmas Pass* along the upper ridge of the mountain range lying in a north-easterly direction from the target. From these positions we would have a bird's eye view of the target below. All the vital points we wanted to hit would be within range of our artillery, mortar fire and even small arms fire. Our positions would cut off the enemy's main supply routes and likely direction of his reinforcements using the road leading to Harare or to Fort Victoria (now Masvingo) to the south west of Umtali. We decided we would deploy a reinforced platoon to lie in ambush on the road leading to Fort Victoria.

From the border the most direct route could take us not more than four hours to reach our target. However, choosing it would be suicidal as it was the most patrolled area and in some places the enemy had laid anti-personnel mines. The recommended route would first take us further away from our target, pass through rural areas where we enjoyed support and avoid those where there were sympathisers for the regime.

If all went according to plan we would be in attack positions within four to five days. Travel would be strictly under cover of darkness as our large numbers could easily compromise our presence and positions.

Once the target was neutralised, the bulk of the force would not return to Mozambique but would split and go to assigned operational areas as reinforcements. Only a platoon of around sixty would accompany Comrade Josiah Tungamirai back to our headquarters in Mozambique.

The next four days after being briefed about our mission were spent rehearsing our movements to the target and equipping our force with the necessary arms and ammunition. Each comrade was provided with food rations to last two days. Beyond that, we would depend on food supplies from our masses.

On the final day after checking that everything was in order, we issued operational orders and introduced the fighters to operational commanders

who would take them to different operational zones as reinforcements once our target was neutralised.

D-Day arrived. There was a mixture of excitement and trepidation as we boarded the FRELIMO trucks that had arrived to take us and our supplies to a predetermined location close to the border with Rhodesia. As dusk settled, Comrade Rex Nhongo gave us a send off address in which he implored and inspired each and every comrade to demonstrate courage and commitment to our struggle. Depending on how we acquitted ourselves, Comrade Nhongo stressed, this could be a defining moment in our struggle.

As we crossed our Rubicon, the protective cover of darkness gave us a measure of security from the prying eyes of the regime's security forces. But also, it induced a fear of the unknown and raised the spectre of lurking danger behind every bush and in every dark shadow.

My training and previous operational experiences had not prepared me sufficiently to appreciate the complexity of marching four hundred and fifty fighters through dark moonless nights, burdened by the punishing weight of arms and ammunition.

A direct approach to the target would take us between three and five hours, but the target would never be reached without falling prey to hungry enemy bullets and an intricate minefield. During the next three days we traversed the rural landscape first in a direction that took us further away from our target before veering towards it.

The reconnaissance had been accurate in its depiction of the terrain over which we would traverse. What it had overlooked or failed to highlight was that, while it was easy to conceal the movement of seven comrades, it was exceedingly more difficult, if not impossible, to conceal the movement of 450 comrades.

Wherever our forces set foot, we created tracks impossible to conceal but inviting to follow. Coordinating the movement of this huge force was a difficult task made more difficult by some comrades dozing during the march and veering off-course. Sometimes we had to delay our move to ensure everyone was accounted for.

Before day break we would have broken into companies and platoons and each platoon or company would camp by the hillside or mountain side. Commanders of the different unit formations would go to the main base where Comrade Tungamirai was, and we would coordinate our movement plans for the coming evening.

On our third day we were unable to reach the hills or mountains before daybreak. Worse still, we crossed the main road linking Umtali to Fort Victoria at the 18 kilometre peg to Umtali after the sun had risen. It took us longer than expected to cross the road because whenever we heard the sound of a vehicle we would lie low until it had passed.

Wherever we camped, it would not take long before our masses knew of our presence and start streaming to our positions with food and intelligence about enemy movements. There was so much excitement amongst our masses about such large numbers of guerrilla forces, and even more so about the inclusion of female fighters amongst us.

As per standard practice, we took advantage of these interactions with the masses to give political orientation and listen to their grievances. Political orientation was the vehicle we used to consolidate the *fish and water* relationship between the fighters and the masses.

Given the size of our force, maintaining the purpose of our mission a guarded secret could not be guaranteed. As it later emerged, some of the comrades had met their relatives in our daily interactions with the masses and, in strict confidence, warned them to leave Umtali because we were coming to attack it. Sometimes the chain of relations extended to members of the Rhodesian forces.

In the small hours of 19 March 1978, we arrived in the Gandayi area – about 15 kilometres to the west of our target. My unit of 64 comrades took up positions on a hillside in kraalhead Mazitu's area. The central command position was located on a mountainside, about two kilometres from our position. Around 10 am I was accompanied by four comrades to go and attend our daily coordination meeting.

Everything was going according to plan. In fact, we were beginning to ridicule the enemy's intelligence for failing to detect the movement of such a large group of fighters in over four days. Even the unusual movements of the masses as they came to our positions with food and to listen to our orientation did not seem to arouse the suspicion of the enemy.

By 1 pm we had finished our coordinating meeting and agreed that at dusk we would begin our final push to the target. We wanted to occupy attack positions by 3 am. The pounding of Umtali was expected to begin anytime between 3.30 am and 4.00 am and last not more than an hour. Once concluded, our force would disband into their respective reinforcement units and melt away.

The masses had already gathered by the time our coordinating meeting ended. Lots of food had been brought and more was still coming from the late comers. The comrades who had accompanied me and I were quickly served lunch before we returned to our base.

As we left the central command, Comrade John Walker, a member of General Staff, was singing to the assembled masses, “*Sendekera mukoma Takanyu*”. I never knew he could sing this song so well. The song was composed and popularised by comrade Murewa, also a member of General Staff, who was in the Transport Department. He could drive a lorry for many kilometres singing that one song and without repeating a verse. There were also two youths, Daniel, who died during the Chimoio attack, and Chikepe who survived the struggle, who could sing the song brilliantly. John Walker was electrifying his audience with the same intensity I had seen Daniel motivating the comrades at a parade a day before he was killed.

We had almost reached our base when we heard the unmistakable sound of an FN rifle, a weapon used by the enemy, from the direction of the central command. An experienced fighter will immediately tell if a bullet has found its mark by the quality of the echoing sound. If it is sharp like the clap of thunder, the target will have been missed. But, if it is a dull thud, it means an animal or human being has been hit. This was unequivocally a sharp sound. Although the enemy fire seemed to be targeted at our main command base, two of our other positions reacted to it by firing mortar bombs. There was no other gun fire from the enemy apart from the initial three short bursts. Without any waste of time we entered our base and radioed the central command.

“John Walker is dead,” was the shocking message we received.

Since the echo of the enemy fire suggested their target had been missed, and the only other fire was of our own mortar bombs, I concluded, and quite rightly too, that Comrade John Walker had been killed by friendly fire.

While I was at the central command my platoon had begun receiving through the *mujibha* network reports of enemy sightings not very far from our base. Now, from our commanding positions on the hill, we could observe the enemy closing in. Surely, as we moved from the central command to our base we had been in the enemy’s sights and within range of his fire. But taking us out prematurely would have alerted those in the base to prepare for an enemy assault. Since we were moving into their

killing zone anyway, the enemy was prepared to wait and take us out together – the commander and his troops.

I ordered my fighters to take up positions without delay. If we allowed the enemy to initiate fire, that would give them the psychological edge and bring panic to the majority of our untested fighters. In a very short space of time my comrades were in attack positions. I quickly inspected their positions, made sure they had sufficient ammunition and that the safety catches of their guns were released. Satisfied with our preparations, I took my position in the centre of my fighters.

The enemy forces were still moving towards our positions, oblivious that they had now entered our killing zone, when I opened fire. That was the signal for all my comrades to follow suit. As my fighters began firing, my own gun fell silent while I studied the effect of our fire and the reaction to it from the enemy. The enemy appeared to be in disarray, with a few returning our fire and the majority scrambling to seek cover. Evidently, command and control had been lost.

For almost forty minutes we dominated the fire fight and I was sure the battle would end soon unless enemy reinforcements arrived quickly. Celebration turned to panic, however, when three helicopters appeared above and started attacking our positions. There were also two spotter planes circling above us, directing the attacking planes to their targets. We directed our fire power towards the enemy planes until jet fighters also joined the fray and began bombing our positions. Now our own command and control was lost. Each one of us sought refuge in some cave, under boulders or in whatever cover or protection the terrain could offer.

As dusk turned to darkness the aerial threat disappeared. Even though there was no fire from the ground, one could not predict the next move by the enemy's ground forces. We could not tell whether they had been obliterated, were in retreat, regrouping, or even attempting to sweep through our positions.

At first I feared the worst – that the majority of my fighters had either been killed or injured. To my relief, by midnight I had managed to account for all but two of my comrades. Miraculously, none of them had been injured. Fearing a follow-up assault when day broke, I repositioned my platoon on another nearby hill under cover of darkness.

It usually took us about three days to have an estimate of dead and injured enemy soldiers from the locals. The second day after the attack,

before receiving feedback on casualty figures, I was ordered to report back to Chimoio Headquarters without delay. Before my departure for Chimoio, the planned attack on Umtali had been suspended and later aborted altogether, due to increased enemy deployments in the area.

When I arrived at Chimoio Headquarters I was informed that I was expected to report to our President and Commander-in-Chief, Comrade Robert Mugabe, in Maputo without delay. Arrangements were already in place for me to fly there. On my arrival in Maputo I immediately was taken to my President's residence where I was informed that I was being redeployed to Socialist Ethiopia as the Chief Representative of ZANU.

I had thus been withdrawn from the battlefield before knowing the fate of my two comrades, as well as the number of casualties we had inflicted on the enemy. It was only when I was in the middle of writing this book that I accidentally got sight of a report written by Comrade Tonderai Nyika,* then Provincial Commander for Manica operational area, on the last operation that I commanded.

From this report I was relieved to learn that my two missing comrades were later located unharmed and that we inflicted significant losses on the enemy.

ZANLA forces scored many operational successes and when the war ended in 1979 were in the process of consolidating and expanding liberated areas in many parts of the country. Amongst the many historic and daring achievements of ZANLA, I would like to single out a few for special mention.

The first battle that was fought by ZANLA forces against the Rhodesian forces, officially marking the beginning of the second *Chimurenga*, took place in Sinoia, now Chinhoyi, on 28 April 1966. This day is now remembered and celebrated as *Chimurenga* Day. On this day seven gallant ZANLA fighters* – Simon Chingosha Nyandoro, Christopher Chatambudza, David Guzuzu, Godwin Manyerenyere, Godfrey Dube, Chubby Savanhu and Arthur Muramba – fought fiercely against better equipped opponents who were using both ground forces and fighter planes. They stood their ground for two days until they ran out of ammunition. They all perished in this great battle. To their credit, they managed to bring down an enemy aircraft and cause a number of fatalities amongst the Rhodesian soldiers.

In December 1978 comrade Edwin Munyaradzi † led a unit of six guerillas that went to attack fuel tanks in Salisbury, the capital city and citadel of the regime's might. The group smuggled weapons into the city by hiding them under tomatoes in vans travelling from Mutoko Tribal Trust Land. They lived in the high density suburb of Harare (now Mbare) and used local sympathisers to obtain transport to move around and reconnoitre their target and for shelter to rest and conceal themselves and their weaponry.

On 11 December 1978 at around 1800 hours they fired several RPG-7 rockets into the bulk storage tanks belonging to BP and Shell in the heavy industrial Southerton area. It was a huge publicity stunt for our struggle when the tanks exploded into a massive sheet of flame which billowed into the night sky. For nearly a week the fire raged on and Salisbury was covered by a fall out of black ash from the burnt fuel. The flames were finally extinguished with South African assistance. The spectacular and glorious inferno was a coup de grace for a regime that boasted of an impeccable and impenetrable intelligence network. The operation was planned and executed with the efficacy and finesse that is normally associated with fictional writing.

With their mission accomplished, our comrades were able to safely withdraw.

ZANLA had a clear policy on deployment which required every member of its forces, including Members of High Command, to have operational experience. This was done to avoid armchair management of the force. A demonstration of this policy was shown when Comrade Tongogara sent the Chief of Operations, Comrade Rex Nhongo (late General Mujuru) and the Deputy Political Commissar, Comrade Dominic Chinenge (General Constantine Chiwenga) who were all Members of ZANLA High Command, to sort out the problem of South African security forces who had been deployed in Mwenezi Range and were preventing the smooth advance of ZANLA forces in Gaza province towards the west. The two commanders moved into Rhodesia and then crossed into South Africa's Vendaland where their forces started attacking South African security posts. The South Africans immediately withdrew from Mwenezi to their side of the border to improve their own security, thus leaving a clean passage for ZANLA to advance through. They thought it was Umkonto We Sizwe forces that were attacking their posts, and yet it was ZANLA.

The deployment of the ZANLA Political Commissar, Comrade Josiah Tungamirai (late Air Marshall and commander of the Airforce of Zimbabwe) to lead the 450 strong force assigned to attack Mutare is another case in point. To describe the innumerable successes and acts of valour by the ZANLA forces could fill volumes of books.



The author's parents, Kanganiso Mujere Mutambara and Karukai Elizabeth Mutambara.

Agrippah Mutambara
Secretary for Neshuro Council Nuanetsi
wakanyangaika nusi wa 24 May, 1975

The diary entry of the author's father reads: "Agrippah Mutambara, Secretary for Neshuro Council, in Nuanetsi, disappeared on 24 May 1975."



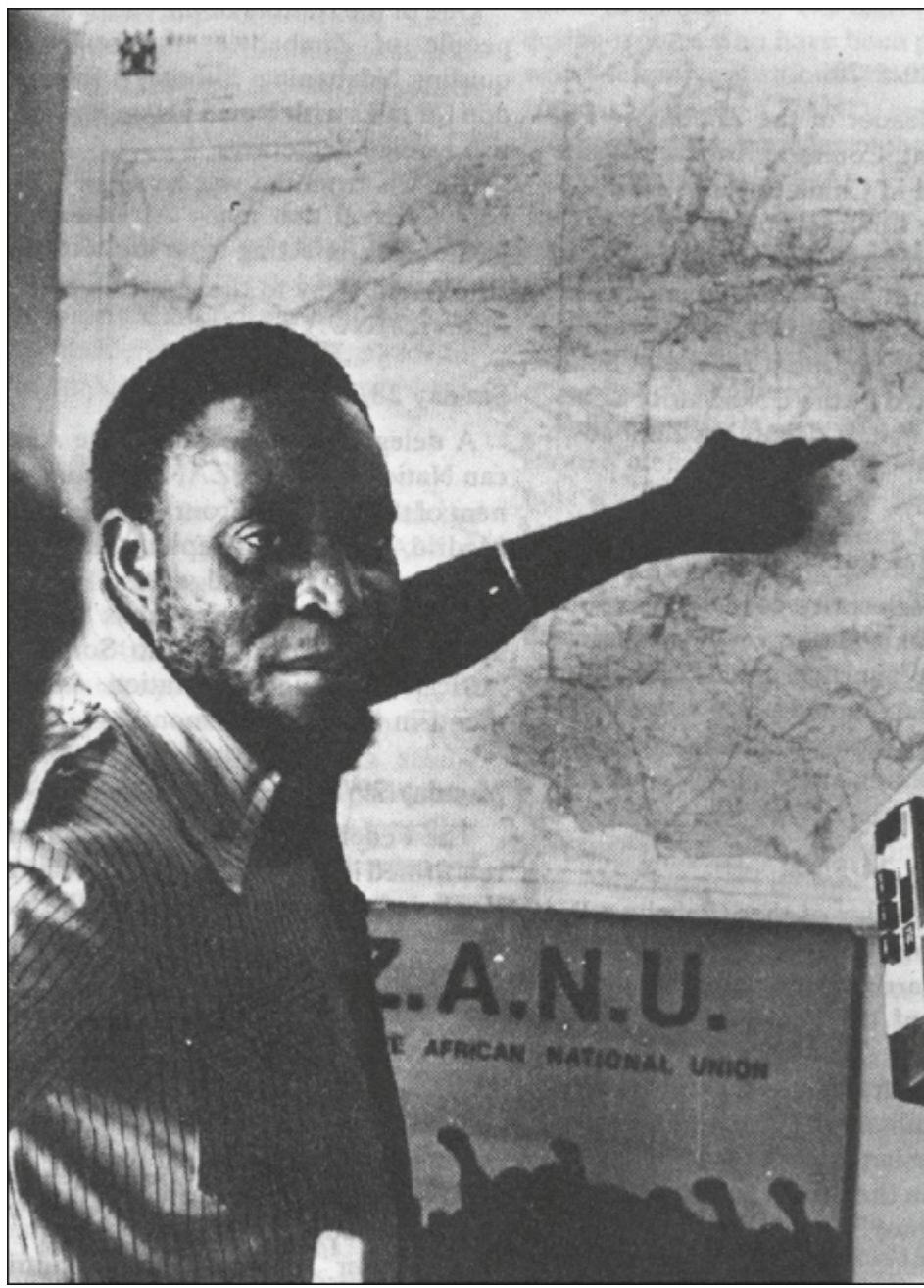
Commando Group under training. Instructors in the front row are, from left: Cde Chibede, Cde Zitterson Zuluka, Cde Oliver Shiri and Cde Dragon Patiripakashata (the author).



The Nyadzonya massacre, 1976.



Buildings damaged in the Chimoio attack, November 1977.



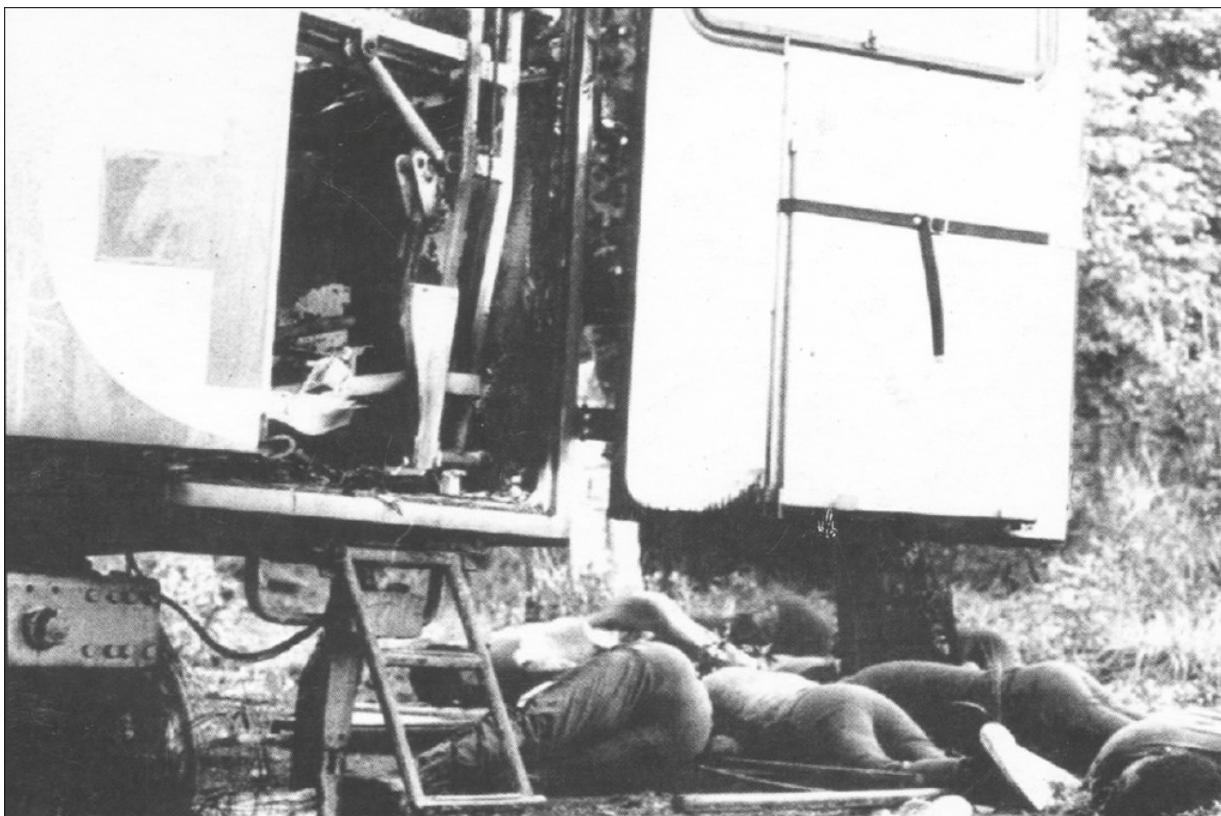
Cde Josiah Magama Tongogara, ZANLA Chief of Defence.



Josiah Tongogara (with AK, at left) rescuing Ruvimbo Mujeni at Chimoio, November 1977.



A mass grave of those who died at the hands of the Rhodesians, Chimoio, November 1977.



The mobile theatre at Chimoio's Parirenyatwa clinic, clearly marked with a red cross, with the bodies of slaughtered medics in front.





Top & center and above: The monument and mass graves at Chimoio, built after independence.



Cde Robert Mugabe inspecting quarter guard mounted by Ethiopian instructors at Tatek.



Cde Mugabe writing a message to be sent by radio to forward units. Behind him is the author (in dark suit and spotted tie) and to his right in a lighter suit, with sunglasses, is Josiah Tongogara.



Chairman Mengistu presenting a pistol to the overall best recruit.

10th April, 1978.

ZIMBABWE AFRICAN NATIONAL UNION (Z.A.N.U)
Z.A.N.U. HEADQUARTERS OPERATION DEPARTMENT..
MANICA PROVINCE OPERATIONAL BASE.
NONOMOTAPA SECTOR.
ZIMUNYA DETACHMENT.

Unit	--	64 Comrades.
Commanders	--	Dragon Petiripakasheta C/S John Tokere C/S Conder Mukadote D/L/S. Karl Machingure D/M.O.
Date and Time	--	19/3/78 3.55p.m. -- 6.55 p.m.
Type of Operation	--	Surprise attack on enemy.
Location	--	Rezitu Kraal (Sandayi area)
Our Strength	--	1x82mm Mortar, 1x60mm Mortar, 1LMG 2 Rocket Launchers, 5 SMG Lancers & SAR's.
Enemy Strength	--	Ground force armed horsemen.
<u>Results:</u>		
Enemy Losses	--	1 spotter plane, one helicopter More than 30 enemy soldiers killed.
Enemy Reaction	--	Reinforced with planes.
Our Losses	--	Nil.
Material Used	--	Unknown
Time Spent	--	1 hr.

General Remarks: How the attack was conducted. Firstly comrades wanted to attack the enemy who was advancing to our base, a heavy fire was fired by Z A N U Forces, Mortar rockets, grenades Lancers SMG's and SAR's Were fired rapidly and no fire was returned. Secondly the enemy reinforced with 3 Helicopters, 2 spotter planes 1 Wamber Jet but comrades were still in positions concentrating their arms fire. That time helicopters were firing out the radius using proper genda bullets to decoy and drive comrades back into the radius waiting for "Mirage Jet fighters to come. Soon the enemy was reinforced by two Mirage Jets bombing at random even into their own groundforce. Comrades were already out of the radius. We were missing two comrades but they were not wounded during the battle. No comrade was injured. One helicopter a spotter plane were gunned down during combat mostof the enemy African soldiers who died were buried there only white troops were carried by helicopters.

Tonderai Nyika (Bilingual Comm)

Zulu/English

Operational report dated 10 April 1978.

(2)

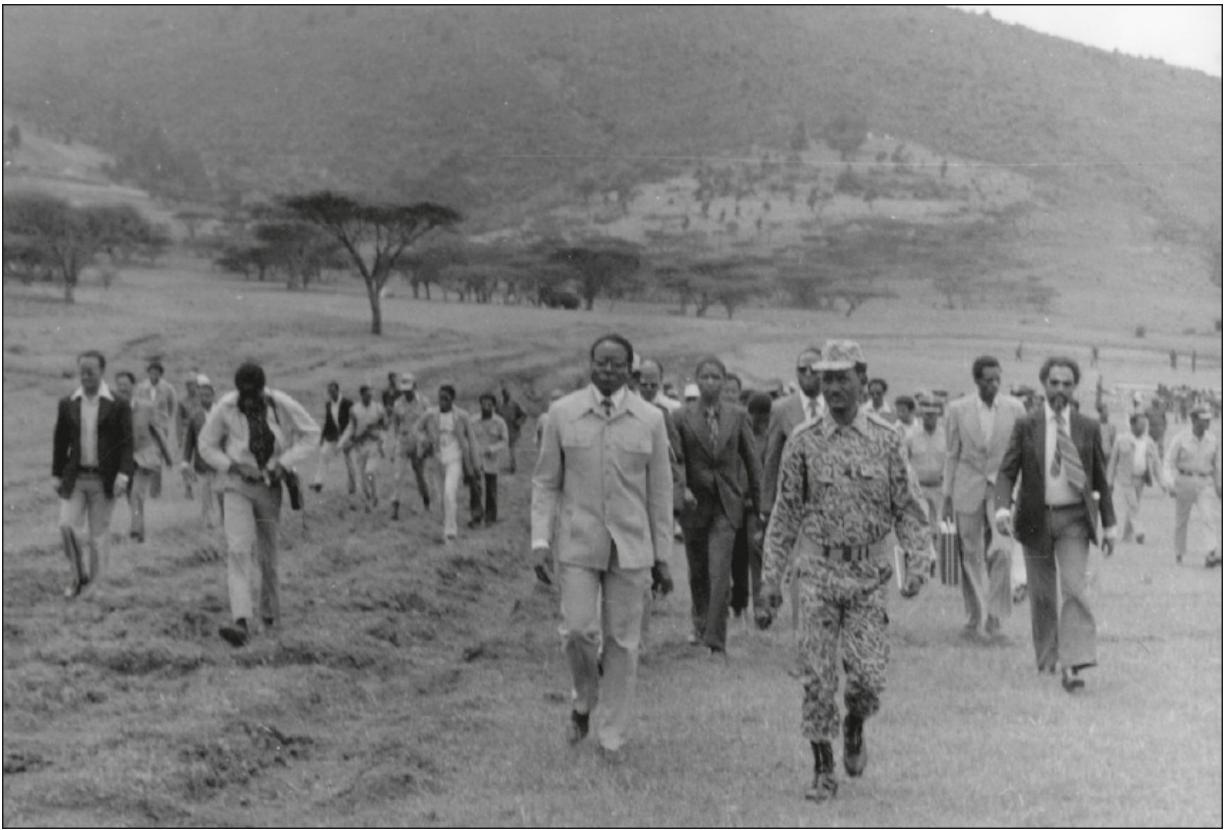
The enemy reinforced on the following day with six Bedfords full of enemy troops to cover those burying african soldiers. The enemy stayed in the area for 3 days firing FN's for mere intimidation. This was a well conducted battle and all combatants had high combat morale despite the heavy battle. This ~~was~~ mobilized most of our masses in Umbali city.

PAMBERT NE Z A N U I

Tondzai Nkika (Provincial Com
Zimbabwe



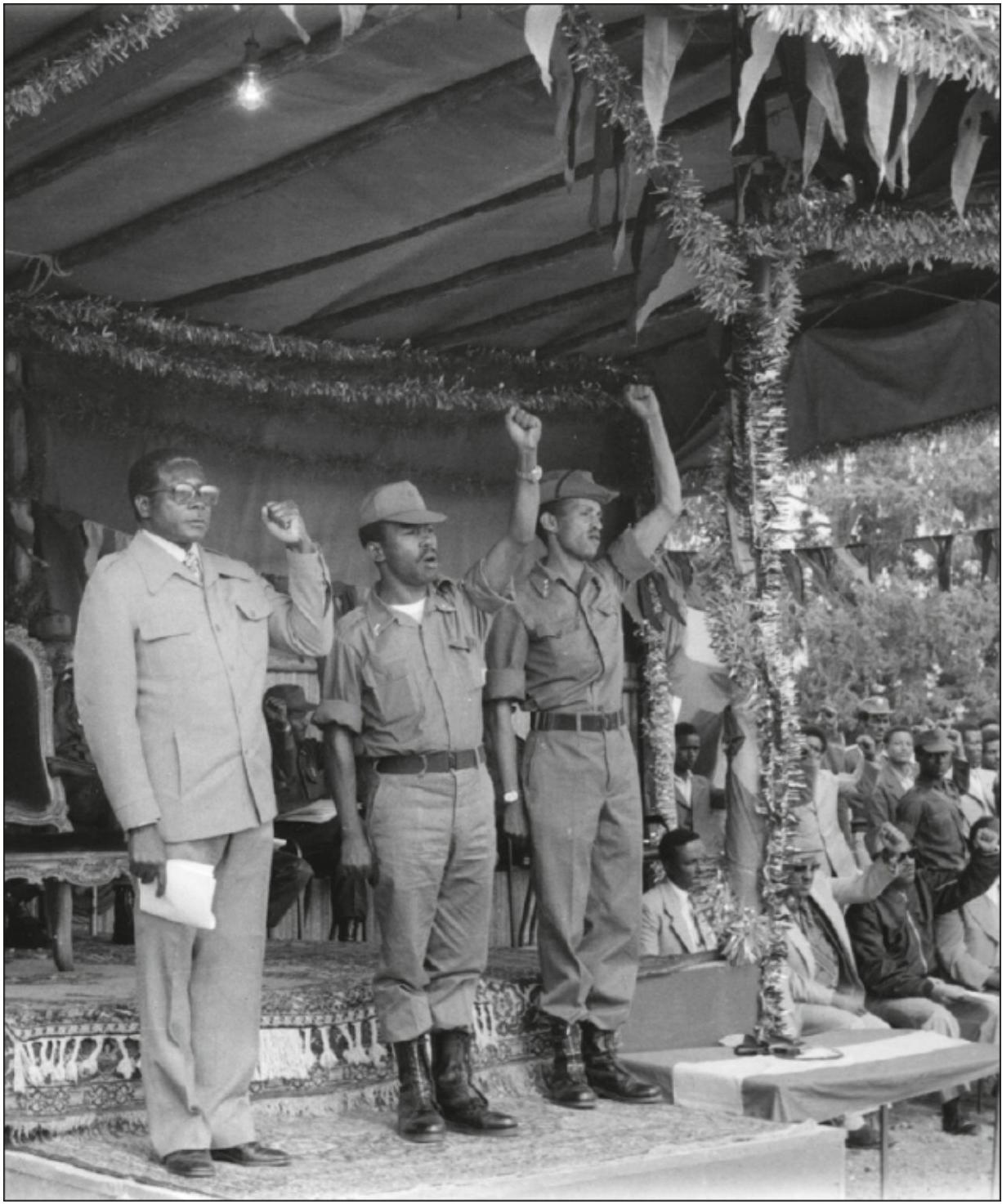
Chairman Mengishtu (with fatigue cap, centre) inspecting a parade mounted by ZANLA recruits.



Cde Mugabe with the chief Ethiopian instructor. Behind them are Cde Dragon Patiripakashata (the author) in dark suit, Cde Tongogara to his immediate left and Cde Martin Macharanga (with briefcase).



Cde Vivian Mwashita hands Cde Mugabe a radio message.



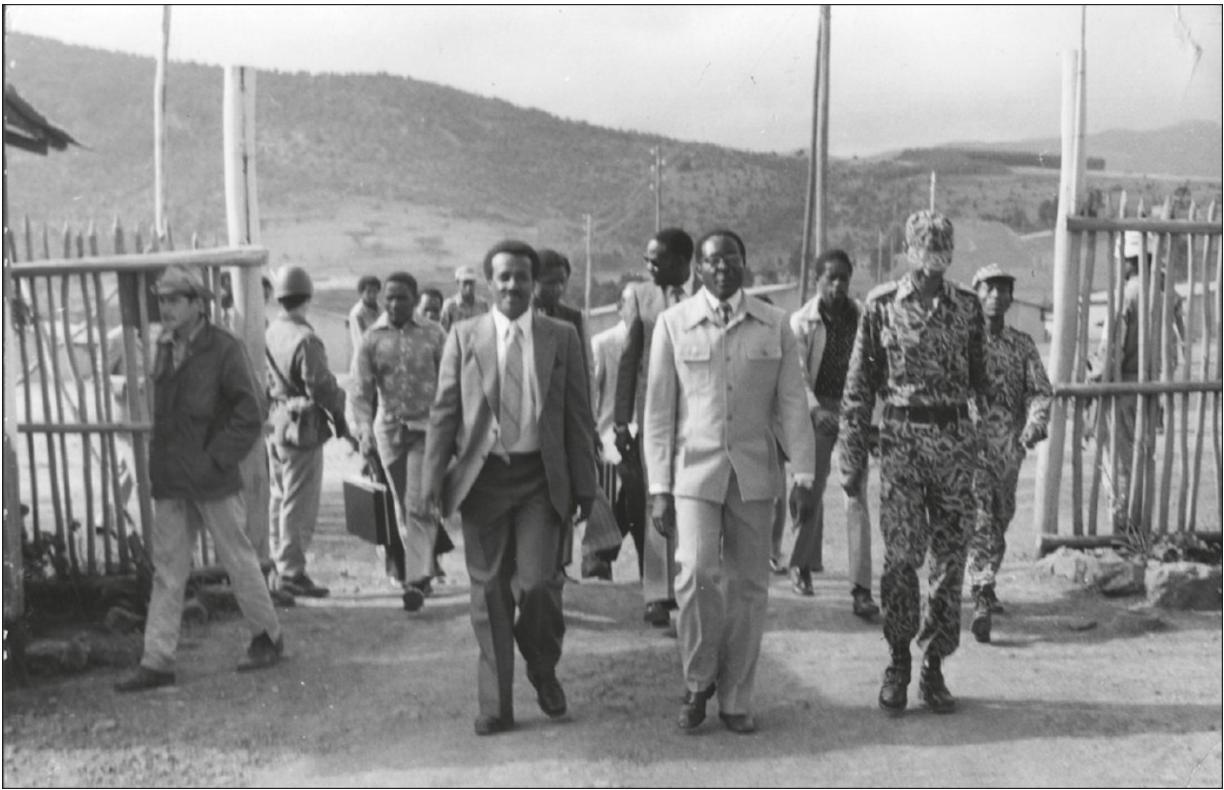
Chairman Mengishtu, flanked by Colonel Afework and Cde Mugabe, responding to slogans at a military rally.



President Robert Gabriel Mugabe.



ZANU Chairman, Herbert Wilshire Chitepo, who directed the armed struggle and was killed by a car bomb in Lusaka, Zambia on 18 March 1975.



Cde Mugabe flanked by Major Darwitt (Foreign Affairs) to his right and Colonel Afework (camp commander) to his left. Behind Mugabe is Josiah Tongogara who is flanked by Cde Victor Mhizha to his left and the author to his right. Cde Danford Munetsi is holding a briefcase.



In July 1979 all ZANU's chief foreign representatives were recalled to Maputo for an intensive briefing in order to intensify ZANU's diplomatic offensive. President Mugabe is flanked by Vice-President Simon Muzenda on his right and Secretary-General Edgar Tekere on his left. Front row (sitting) from left: Cde J. Chimbande (Tanzania), Cde L. Maziwisa (Romania) and Cde J. Mandebvu (Libya); second row (kneeling) from left: Cde J. Kangai (USA), Cde A. Chidoda (Canada), Cde R. Chivhiya (West Africa) and Cde J. Shoniwa (Sweden); back row (standing) from left: Cde D. Patiripakashata (Ethiopia), Cde F. Shava (UK); Cde Mombeshora (Egypt), Cde S. Makoni (West Germany), Cde Simbarashe (Australia) and Cde M. Chademana (Botswana).



General 'Tongo', all-round commander and military strategist *par excellence*, in combat pose.



Cde Rex Nhongo, a brave, fearless fighter.

* Comrade Josiah Tungamirai joined the Armed Forces and rose to the rank of Air Marshal. He was the first black Airforce Commander. He died of natural causes after retiring and was declared a national hero.

† Comrade Agnew Kambeu, after independence, reverted to the use of his real name, Ammoth Chimombe. On Independence Day in 1980 he hoisted for the first time the Zimbabwe flag. He served in the Zimbabwe National Army and retired as a Lt. General. He was declared a national hero and is buried at the National Heroes Acre.

‡ Comrade Sobhusa Gazi (real name Gula Ndebele) served in the army after independence. He was later to become Attorney-General.

* Christmas Pass is a mountain pass that leads into the city of Mutare in Zimbabwe. It was so named by some of the colonial pioneers who camped at the foot of the pass on Christmas Day, 1890.

* After independence, Comrade Tonderai Nyika (real name Paradzai Zimondi) joined the Zimbabwe National Army. He retired with the rank of Major General and was appointed Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Prison Services.

* The names of the Sinoia seven are as corrected in the new edition of *The Struggle* taken from the Heroes Acre publication.

† Comrade Edwin Munyaradzi (real surname Chitekedza) joined the Zimbabwe National Army after independence and retired with the rank of Brigadier General. He died and was declared a National Hero.

Chapter 8

CHIMOIO ATTACK – RHODESIAN GENOCIDE

Introduction

Ours was a long and arduous struggle, punctuated by heroic sacrifices as well as heart rending calamities. Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters was the setting for one such calamity. Out of the gloom and doom unleashed on 23 November 1977, a new purposefulness and determination was born that propelled our revolutionary armed struggle to its intended conclusion – independence for Zimbabwe in 1980.

What follows in this chapter is a comprehensive exposé of the genocidal tendencies of the callous colonial regime that we fought and vanquished.

Situated about 85 kilometres from the border with Zimbabwe, Chimoio town is in central Mozambique and is the capital of Manica province. During the era of Portuguese colonial rule that ended in 1975, Chimoio was known as Vila Pery. The town is located along the main rail and road linking Beira, a strategic port city and capital of the neighbouring province of Sofala, to Mutare, capital of the eastern Manicaland province of Zimbabwe.

The name ‘Chimoio’, rather than the town itself, has more significance to the people of Zimbabwe and is immortalised in the annals of the country’s history. Its significance stems from a farm that was abandoned by its Portuguese owner during the height of the liberation struggle against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique, and donated by the FRELIMO led government to ZANU to be used as the operational headquarters of its military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). The farm thus became the nerve centre of all ZANLA operations and hereafter the ZANLA Headquarters shall be referred to just as ‘Chimoio’.

As described in the chapter on ‘Guerrilla Training’, I first came to Chimoio in the first half of 1976 after completing my basic training at Tembwe. Apart from brief periods of deployment to operational areas in Zimbabwe, most of my time between 1976 and 1978 was spent at Chimoio where I was an instructor.

Prelude to attack

The voice was distant and barely audible. Either I was dreaming or imagining it. Throughout the night I had been having strange dreams. Each time I woke up, I could not tell what the dream was about. This had happened to me on many occasions in the past. I would dream, but on waking up, forget what the dream was all about. Long after I woke up, or days later, something would happen that would trigger a vivid recollection of what I had dreamed of and the relevance of the dream to the unfolding events. Did someone tell me that a dream lasts only a fraction of a second? How is it, then, that I had been dreaming the whole night?

“Comrade Dragon, your water is getting cold. Are you going to take a bath now or a little later?”

The voice was now nearer and clearer, maybe coming from just outside the door to my hut. I was irritated that whoever was speaking was disturbing my thought process. I decided I could no longer tolerate these persistent interruptions and called out to the faceless character outside my hut to leave me alone.

That’s when I was woken up by my two batmen, who were shaking me in near panic. “Comrade Dragon, Comrade Dragon, please wake up. Are you feeling alright?” cried Kelvin.

Supported by my left elbow I raised my upper body, rubbed my eyes with my right hand and threw off the blanket. Confused and blinking rather stupidly, I stared at the two men. I knew something was wrong for them to wake me up in this way.

“Comrade Dragon, are you sure you are okay?” Donaldson, my other batman asked again.

“Of course I am okay. Why?” I was a little irritated.

I became aware that I was sweating and my body was trembling. “What has happened?” Now there was urgency in my voice as I demanded an explanation while trying to control my panicking voice.

“You have been screaming at the top of your voice and we came rushing, thinking that something had happened to you”, Kelvin responded.

I heaved a sigh of relief and reassured them. “Thank God, nothing has happened to me. Maybe it was just a bad dream.”

Every officer of my rank was entitled to two batmen. For male officers, these would be young men between 14 and 20 years of age, and in the case of female officers, it would be girls of similar age. The role of a batman was

to cater for all aspects of an officer's welfare. These would include tidying the hut, taking care of the laundry, providing water to bathe, arranging food for the officer, keeping the officer's personal weapons clean and with sufficient ammunition, accompanying the officer wherever he went, and anticipating and satisfying his/her needs.

Batmen were handpicked by the officer under whom they served and usually camaraderie developed between them. I enjoyed such a relationship with my batmen. They understood perfectly well my temperament, my likes and dislikes and the extent to which they could share jokes with me. To the rank and file, batmen had become a privileged class. They were excused from the daily chores other comrades undertook, such as constructing and renovating barracks, going to collect firewood kilometres away from their base as early as 4 am, digging latrines and keeping them tidy, taking turns to cook food for large numbers, and carrying out guard duties. Thus, batmen assumed something of the privileges of their respective officers.

I was now fully awake. I took my watch from the bedside table and checked the time. It was 6.30 am and I still had time, at least an hour, to bath and dress before a twenty minute walk to my duty station at the National Stores. I put my watch back on the bedside table, but for some reason decided to check the time again. As before, I reached out and took my watch. Yes, it was 6.30 am, but something caught my attention as I was about to put away my watch. The 'second' hand was not moving.

"Kelvin," I called to one of my batmen, "can you confirm what time it is?"

He looked at his watch and responded, "7.25 Comrade Dragon."

'Oh my God', I moaned to myself. 'I am already late'.

The date was 23 November 1977. It was a serene day and clouds covered the sky. In exactly 10 minutes I had brushed my teeth, washed my face and dressed in my camouflage uniform. If I had decided to take a full bath I would not have made up for the lost time. By 7.42 am I was out of my hut and on my way to the National Stores with Kelvin by my side. But somehow I felt naked, as if a vital part of my dressing was missing. Then I remembered.

"Kelvin, I have forgotten to take my rifle. You should have reminded me," I rebuked him.

"I could have reminded you Comrade Dragon, but remember that yesterday you left your rifle at Takawira 2," he responded.

Before being appointed the Acting Director of Politics for ZANLA two months ago, I had been a military instructor at Takawira Training Camp. I knew all the instructors at this camp and among them I had some close friends. Occasionally I visited the camp to spend some time with my friends. The latest visit was the previous day. At 5 pm, after completing my day's assignment, I told Kelvin that we were going to Takawira Base 2 first before going to our own camp – the Headquarters base (HQ for short).

As we were leaving the National Stores, most of the comrades who lived within the National Stores Base had assembled at the parade ground and were singing revolutionary songs (Chimurenga songs, as we popularly referred to them). Daniel, a young man aged between 13 and 15 years was leading the singing. He, together with another young man of his age known as Chikepe, had become revolutionary icons within ZANLA for their talented singing of Chimurenga songs and their unparalleled abilities to motivate others, young and old alike.

As Kelvin and I were going past the parade ground, Daniel had started singing a song and the parade began responding to his tune, when he abruptly stopped the singing and with an authoritative voice demanded, "Comrades, are you tired of the struggle? Why do you sing without vigour?"

When he started singing the same tune again, there was a transformation in the spirited way the parade responded. I thought to myself, 'This young man shall doubtlessly grow to be a powerful and inspiring leader'. But I was wrong.

We arrived at Takawira Base 2 at 6.15 pm. Training classes had ended just over an hour before our arrival and most instructors had gone to their huts. Edward Pedzisai was one of my best friends. He was an instructor specialising in sub-machineguns. I went straight to his hut and found him in the process of removing his shoes so that he could rest on his bed. We spent twenty minutes together, talking and laughing. Finally, it was time to leave before it got dark. I promised to visit him again in the next four to six days.

As I stepped out of his hut, Edward called to me, "Dragon, can you lend me your AK-47 for a few days please. We are short of sub-machineguns for our lessons. When you come back in about four days, you can collect it." As mentioned previously, in our guerrilla parlance we used the term 'sub-machine gun' quite loosely to identify a variety of weapons, including the AK-47 assault rifle. These things that had happened the previous day now

flashed back into my memory as Kelvin and I made our way to the National Stores.

The National Stores, for ZANLA forces, was the equivalent of a national food distribution centre. All our bases in Mozambique were supplied and replenished from there. The base had a huge warehouse with a capacity to store food enough to feed all our forces in Mozambique for at least one year, if filled to capacity. To my knowledge, it had never been full. I knew that it had been empty for most of the past year, with less than ten percent of its capacity filled at any given time. In that period we probably had more deaths caused by hunger than by enemy fire.

This year the picture had changed for the better. Already the warehouse was three quarters full and still large trucks were delivering fresh supplies. The logistics department had worked hard and deserved accolades. Most of the foodstuff was donated by organizations based in Europe and the USA.

Whenever I saw cartons of foodstuffs with the bold labels ‘MADE IN USA’ or ‘PRODUCT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM’ or ‘JAPANESE PRODUCTS’ I never ceased to wonder how these great nations that were openly hostile to our struggle could be the providers of the means of sustenance for that struggle. The explanation I always got was that the foodstuffs and items of clothing were donations from progressive organisations in those capitalist countries. This was a reasonable explanation, but it begged the question, ‘could these organisations or individuals donate such huge quantities of undisguised supplies to a so-called terrorist organisation without the tacit knowledge or approval of their governments?’ That they clearly did was yet another bizarre example of the weaknesses of the capitalist system. Kelvin and I arrived at the National Stores at 8.10 am. I shared some jokes with the six comrades who were off-loading stores from a 10-tonne truck into the warehouse as I went by, leaving them in fits of laughter. I hastened on to an adjacent building, ten metres away, to commence my day’s assignment. The sky was overcast, raising hopes that the usual hot and humid conditions under which we worked in our tiny operations room would be moderated. Today there appeared to be a serene quality to the atmosphere. Like a calm before the storm.

Kelvin would always accompany me into the room, place my briefcase on the table, and then excuse himself. Once outside the room he would stay within earshot, in case I needed to send him on an errand. During lunch he

would come to check that I had sufficient food and there were no additional requirements. After work in the evenings Kelvin would be by my side as we went back to our base, or wherever I chose to go. The ever-cheerful Kelvin was like my own child.

This day, because I was a little late, I told Kelvin there was no need to come into my office. He handed me my briefcase at the entrance to the room and politely asked if I would allow him to go to the National Armoury to draw a rifle for me while my own was at Takawira 2 Training Camp. He assured me it would not take him more than one-and-a-half hours to go there and back.

Blessed are those parents who have children so faithful, so loyal, and as caring as Kelvin was to me. I told him to hurry and quipped, “Don’t be long; I won’t know what to do without you!”

That was the last time I saw Kelvin alive.

Attack – Day 1

As I entered the room, all the members of my team were seated and in the middle of eating their breakfast, at the same time listening to the news from the Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation. Listening to the enemy’s broadcasts was an essential part of a commissar’s job in order to know the propaganda the enemy used and to devise effective counters to it. The team comprised the commanders of the National Stores Base from which we were now operating; Comrades Mabhunu Muchapera and Batai Gidi, political commissars from Tembwe Training Camp in Tete province of Mozambique; Comrades Tererai Zanu and Tendai Midzimu, political commissars from Takawira Base 1 and Takawira Base 2 respectively; Comrades Ridzai Bazooka, Chenjerai Magorira, Rugare Tangenhamo, Captain Devil, Shadreck Shumba, and Fadzai Magamba, all sector commissars withdrawn from operational areas all around Rhodesia in order to participate in the programme we were engaged in.

The room we occupied and from which, for the last two weeks, we were redrawing our political strategies in light of the fast changing political landscape in Rhodesia, had become our operational HQ. I estimated it would take us an additional eight to ten weeks to complete the revision and, where necessary, re-writing of our political lessons.

When Comrade Tongogara, the Chief of Defence of the ZANLA forces, had announced my appointment as the Acting Director of Politics two

months earlier, I had formulated and won approval of my plans to considerably revamp the political department, both in terms of its organisational structure and the quality and relevance of its orientation. What we were engaged in right now was laying a foundation for the realisation of my vision. It was indeed a mammoth task, critical to the effective prosecution and ultimate success of the revolutionary struggle. I had accepted the challenge and realised that my credibility and political fortunes depended on its successful implementation. This room, I believed, had much relevance to the future of our Party and struggle, as well as to my own.

As the architect of the new vision, every member of the team looked upon me to chart the course we were to follow. For the first time since we started our programme, I had been the last to arrive. To the team, this was rather unusual because I was always the first to arrive and was always emphasising the need for being punctual. While there was obvious relief on their faces that I had finally arrived, the fifteen minute delay was not very significant because on each day, the first thirty minutes were devoted to eating breakfast, listening to the enemy broadcasts and engaging in some idle chat. I quickly took my breakfast in order not to hold back those who had arrived much earlier.

I was about to announce the start of our day's work when we heard a loud noise. It sounded like a huge aircraft was over-flying our position at a low altitude. I suggested to the team that we go outside and investigate the source of the noise. The pitch of my voice made my suggestion sound like an order and the team responded accordingly. In a few seconds, we were standing outside, eyes turned upwards, searching the sky.

Flying above the clouds and not visible, the plane, or what we believed to be an airplane, flew over our position. Within a minute the sound had faded into the distance and I ordered the team back into our room for business.

As we trooped back into our room we were talking about this mysterious plane and the noise it made. A few of our members had settled into their seats and the rest were pulling out their chairs in order to sit when we heard the sound of the plane again. In everyone's mind it was peculiar that the plane that had flown over our position less than three minutes ago should be returning, and so soon too.

No order was given and none was necessary as the team, sensing that something was amiss, dashed outside to re-investigate. Whereas previously

we had noted only the receding sound of an airplane, we were now horrified to see bombs dropping from the sky and the big noisy plane that flew past first camouflaged the sound of the many more attacking planes following behind.

That's when I remembered the dream*, more vividly than when I was dreaming it. I knew then that Kelvin was dead, and needed no further confirmation. Why didn't I recall the dream when I woke up this morning? Maybe I could have sent Kelvin far away to safety. Or, I would not have allowed him to go to the National Armoury. He would be by my side right now. Just as we had been when he was alive! A sense of betrayal engulfed me for failing the ever faithful Kelvin in his hour of greatest need.

I remained rooted to the spot where we had searched the skies for the strange noise. But other members of the team had melted away. I stood alone, as if in a trance, convinced that if Kelvin were alive he would be by my side.

A bomb hit the ground five metres away from where I was standing, but failed to detonate. Had it exploded I would have been history. What it succeeded in doing, however, was to break the trance that had immobilised me. I was convinced that even in death Kelvin had intervened to save my life.

My eyes travelled some hundred metres away, before I started to move, and I saw two members of my team in flight; Comrade Ridzai Bazooka was leading with the Base Commander hot on his heels.

Thoughts tumbled through my mind. 'Who are they fleeing from? The enemy is not on the ground but in the air and highly mobile and capable of going in any direction.' As if to justify my logic and as I watched, the two comrades ran into the path of a falling bomb. The bomb exploded. Even before its debris landed on the ground, my two comrades had fallen. I raced towards them, determined to attempt to save their lives if they were not already dead.

When our team had its first meeting two weeks ago, we had spent our first few hours together introducing ourselves. Comrade Ridzai Bazooka, who had just come from the home front, took a good thirty minutes describing his battlefield exploits. His was the most fascinating self-introduction. He held the team spellbound as he described how he got out of enemy ambushes on several occasions, courageously commanded his platoon in the face of an enemy's combined air and ground attack, freed two

of his comrades who had been captured by the enemy in a most daring raid on an enemy camp, and many other heroic deeds. A fighter of remarkable courage and outstanding achievements indeed!

I was about five metres away from my comrades when I saw what the bomb had done to them. Comrade Ridzai Bazooka lay with his face buried in the ground, as if ashamed that the real truth about his battlefield exploits was about to be revealed. His head was pinned to the ground by a metal spike that entered from the back of his head. It must have been part of the debris that landed after he had fallen. One did not need to be a doctor to know that he was dead. The Base Commander, with his body turned upwards, was gasping for air as I knelt down and took his hand.

He had a large gash on the left side of his chest that was very deep, and I believed his heart, lungs and kidneys were damaged. I knew there was nothing I could do to save him. Fear and panic distorted his face – his eyes were popping out and his facial muscles were contorting. I doubted that he recognised me. And then, it seemed, he had given up the struggle to live. His face began to relax and his eyes looked up blankly. His hand closed on mine as if he wanted me to accompany him on the journey he had begun to another world. I extricated myself from his grip. The fear and panic I had seen on his face left the lifeless body and sought a new home – in me!

I was gripped with the same sensations and I ran. The logic that there was no enemy on the ground made no sense anymore. I wanted to flee, in any direction, to anywhere.

I became conscious of heavy, sustained fire aimed at the enemy planes. Comrades were offering resistance, and yet here was their commander and trainer, consumed with fear and panic. The thought had a sobering effect and I got control of myself. But only for a moment as a new panic overtook me – I do not have a gun!

By now I was about thirty metres away from my two dead comrades, and I suddenly made a u-turn and started running back to them, or what was left of them. ‘I must get a gun!’ The more I repeated these words to myself, the more urgent the need became, and the faster I ran.

Experience shows that at least eighty percent of those with the responsibility to prepare or to keep stocks of food for others – be they chefs in hotels or restaurants, cooks in any organisation, or private homes – develop large stomachs, generally bigger than those of their customers or bosses. The Base Commander belonged to this group. Even last year when

comrades were dying from starvation, his gut remained very large. If you had seen him without clothes you could have mistaken his huge, black and shiny belly for that of a nine-month pregnant woman, until you looked at his bearded male face. No wonder that in flight he had trailed the nimble Comrade Ridzai Bazooka – the Base Commander's skinny legs found his large belly too heavy to carry.

I reached the bodies and wasted no time in recovering an AK-47 that the Base Commander had carried and was now laying half a metre from his body. A special magazine with a capacity for forty bullets was fitted into the gun. Tied on either side of this magazine with strips of elastic cut from old tyre tubes were two regular spare magazines (each with a capacity of 30 bullets). You could fit any of the spare magazines without having to separate them.

The safety catch had not been released, evidence that the gun was not being fired when the Base Commander fell victim to the enemy bomb. This meant that I had a hundred bullets – far below what I needed for the long battle I expected to lie ahead. I attempted to remove the webbing belt strapped across the Base Commander's chest and containing spare ammunition. But I could not roll him over to free the belt from under his body as he was just too heavy. My attention then shifted to Comrade Ridzai Bazooka's body. With little effort I was able to release his webbing belt, containing ten standard magazines, and strap it around my own chest. Armed with an AK-47 and the spare ammunition belt I was now dressed and ready for battle.

For the first time since the attack began, I seriously began reviewing the battlefield scenario, determined that I would offer whatever resistance I possibly could. So far, it seemed, the enemy was using only fixed wing aircraft to bombard both moving and pre-determined fixed targets. As for moving targets, I supposed that any groups of five and above would attract the immediate attention of the enemy. So far my movements had been solitary and, although I had not been concentrating on the enemy's *modus operandi*, it seemed I had not presented an attractive target. I decided that I should return to the National Stores and find out if any more of my team members had survived.

I was almost thirty metres away from my dead comrades when I heard a bomb explode behind me. As I quickly turned to investigate I did not feel any pain as a fragment from the bomb lodged itself in my right thigh. The

corpses of my two comrades had been bombed again into unrecognisable remains. I was confused as to why the enemy should want to bomb dead bodies; then it dawned on me that the target had probably been me. When I had been struggling to retrieve a gun and ammunition, I presented a stationary target that, in the absence of a larger target, was a welcome alternative to a pilot who had to dispose of his payload before going back to base.

The team I had so meticulously assembled and in whose abilities I had so much confidence was being dissolved – dissolution through decimation. It was like watching a house one had painstakingly built succumbing to the powerful force of an earthquake.

As I continued my ‘backward advance’* to the National Stores, I scanned the battlefield. The whole of Chimoio, all the fourteen bases, had been turned into one big battlefield. Dotted all over its vast expanse I could see frightened comrades in flight. A hornet’s nest had been disturbed and the whole battleground was a hive of uncoordinated activity. Amidst this chaos I discerned isolated pockets of resistance coming from at least three directions.

Greater resistance seemed to be coming from the direction of Takawira 2 Training Base. This made sense as this base, capable of holding one thousand comrades at any one time, had the highest concentration of trained and armed personnel. Besides, even if they were afraid, the instructors had to have the courage to demonstrate that the tactics they taught were effective and capable of implementation. Otherwise, when the battle ended, how would they be able to face the recruits and convince them that the training they were getting was superior to that of the enemy? The enemy they were training to fight in Rhodesia was the enemy they were confronting now. The resources that were at the disposal of the enemy now were a tiny fraction of the resources the enemy would have at his disposal in Rhodesia. The terrain on which the battle was being fought was more familiar to our forces, thereby reducing the possibility of the enemy deploying ground forces.

Though some factors were more favourable to us, the enemy had the advantage of speed, surprise and the big target our forces presented, comprising both armed and unarmed combatants. On closer scrutiny of the aerial targets the enemy planes represented, it was clearly evident the volume of fire by our forces did not correspond to actual targets at any

given time. Even when there were no planes over-flying the base, a heavy barrage of small arms fire continued into the empty sky. The random firing taking place now was reminiscent of the experience I had with my platoon during my first operational deployment.

The second area of strong resistance was Takawira Base1. This had been the main training base for our recruits before the opening of Takawira Base 2 in early 1977. Takawira Base 1 was now being used for specialist training in areas such as engineering, multi-barrelled anti-aircraft guns, bazookas, mortars and heavy machineguns. Participants on these specialist courses were mostly experienced guerrilla fighters and a few others who would have just completed their basic training in guerrilla tactics. The base had at any given time about two hundred occupants. Resistance to the enemy bombardment at this base was disciplined. Whenever enemy planes over flew the base they were greeted with a heavy barrage of fire from anti-aircraft guns, heavy machineguns and small arms. When there were no planes flying over the base, the guns went silent.

The third and final direction from which I could detect coordinated resistance was the Headquarters (HQ) itself. There were between fifty and sixty comrades performing guard duties at this base at all times. Whenever senior ZANLA commanders came to Chimoio, they would be accommodated at this base. These included Members of the Politburo, Members of the Central Committee, and Members of High Command. The only person who, on the insistence of the then President of Mozambique, Comrade Samora Machel, was not allowed to spend the night at Chimoio, was Comrade President Robert Gabriel Mugabe. Because of the high profile commanders requiring protection, only experienced fighters performed guard duties at the HQ Base, even though most of the time there would be no one to protect.

As I marvelled at the spirited manner with which the comrades appeared to be defending the HQ, I wondered about whether there was a senior commander at the base. For the past two weeks, I was the most senior commander staying at the Headquarters, after the ZANLA Chief of Operations, Comrade Rex Nhongo, had left for an external visit. This morning when Kelvin and I left for the National Stores, no report of the arrival of a senior commander had been given to me. If one had arrived, surely Kelvin would have mentioned it to me. Thoughts of Kelvin brought fresh pain to my injured soul. If only I had remembered the dream when I

woke up, I could have done something to save Kelvin. It was now too late. Well, at least none of our most senior commanders were at Chimoio when the attack began. Why on earth was I worrying myself with this?

But much as I wanted to shake the thought away, it kept on bouncing back. I began imagining that I had seen Comrade Tongogara's car parked outside the house he always stayed in when he was at Chimoio. Was it really imagination, or maybe I was recalling another detail I had forgotten in the dream, or was it reality? Whether it was fantasy, dream or reality, the effect was just the same.

My heart beat hard against my chest like the pistons of a car trying to free themselves. Comrade Tongogara! No, it can't be his car. But, even if it was, maybe his driver came alone to collect something. That can't be true; I have never seen the driver coming to Chimoio in Comrade Tongogara's car without Comrade Tongogara. Okay, let us suppose Comrade Tongogara came in his car, and the attack began when he was at the HQ, it does not mean that he is dead. Dead! Dear Lord, Comrade Tongogara dead! Butterflies flew in my stomach and my legs felt like jelly. I wished I could fly to the HQ, then I could establish the true facts, but instead my feet seemed held to the ground by a tonne of steel.

In our political orientation we stressed that individuals come and go but the Party always remains. Indeed, I had seen many individuals perish while the Party continued to grow in strength. But the same could not be said about Comrade Tongogara or Comrade Mugabe. If one or both of them were to go, a significant chunk of the Party would go with them. Such was the high esteem in which the two comrades were held within both ZANU and ZANLA.

I decided it would be suicidal to go to the HQ now and alone, to investigate the impact of the initial wave of attacks. My focus once again shifted to the National Stores.

By now I was about forty metres away from the place where my team had assembled to begin its daily routine. I was passing by the edge of the parade ground where yesterday there was singing and where young Daniel was motivating the comrades to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the struggle. That picture of hope and inspiration had been replaced by the death, destruction and despair that greeted me, nay that mocked me, as I surveyed the aftermath of the enemy's ferocious bombardment of the parade ground.

It is dangerous to establish a routine in a war situation. We knew it, we taught against it, and yet we practised it. We did so not through ignorance or forgetfulness, but through conceit. The enemy would never dare attack Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters! He knows it is well defended and will cost him a humiliating defeat. Such was our arrogance that when the attack took place, we were least prepared to defend our flagship.

Every day at about eight in the morning and five in the evening, we held parades at all our bases. The morning parade presented the opportunity to assign tasks for the day and to practise military drills. The evening parade was used to impart any important information, but most importantly, to inform all our forces of the password for the evening. Passwords enabled one to identify friend from foe, and every evening a different password was given. The morning parade at the National Stores had just ended and the comrades were beginning to disperse to perform their allotted tasks when the attack began. Obviously the enemy knew our routine and timed his attack to coincide with the parades. Now, before my eyes, I could see many bodies strewn over the parade ground. Without paying close attention to each individual body, I concluded that they were all dead.

But just then, from the corner of my eye, I thought I detected some movement from one of the bodies, and I went to investigate. Staring at me, mortally wounded but with no fear on his face, was little Daniel. I could see he was clasping his AK-47 in his right hand. There was no magazine on the gun. I saw then that the magazine had fallen close to where his body lay, but there were no bullets in it. It seemed strange that he should be carrying a magazine without bullets. I examined his gun and saw that it had not been damaged and its safety catch had been released.

His left arm and a small portion of his shoulder attached to it had been ripped away from the rest of his body. The upper part of the arm had been shattered by a large fragment from a bomb, but the hand that had been sawn off the arm and thrown four metres away from the body had no lacerations and was still clasping a loaded magazine. I realised that Daniel had emptied his magazine firing at the enemy and had been mortally wounded as he was trying to load a new magazine onto his gun. By any measure, this was a most courageous young man. I bent down to offer him comfort, and kissed his cheek. My little hero smiled at me and with his last breath whispered, “THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!”

It was as if he had waited for me to come in order to pass on his message. I knew what I needed to do for the sake of Daniel, for the sake of Kelvin, and for the sake of all the comrades who had perished for the cause of freedom. I knew I had no choice to make, for little Daniel had made it for me. The farewell smile on his courageous face was imprinted on my mind and shall forever inspire me to continue the struggle. The struggle against the enemy we were confronting. The struggle against injustice; the struggle against colonial oppression; the struggle against racism in all its forms and guises; the struggle against the notion of a superior race and its doctrine of deprivation of one race by another; the struggle against corruption; and the unforeseen struggle against an unforeseen enemy. In those three telling words, Daniel had said it all, and I took up the gauntlet.

Judging from my recent experience I knew that if I spent too long in one place lamenting the death of Daniel I could again become an opportunistic target and my fate would be the same as his. Young in body, but not in spirit, young in age, but mature in wisdom, that was Daniel, my hero. He deserved a hero's burial, but there was no chance of that for now. My attention shifted again to completing my journey back to the National Stores – a journey that so far had been fraught with obstacles.

I surveyed my destination from the forty metres that separated me from it. There was smoke billowing up from three locations on the roof of the warehouse. From my position it was not possible to see the room where we had been working as it was on the other side of the warehouse. As if to emphasise the danger that lay ahead, a jet swooped low over the warehouse and dropped its lethal payload, leaving behind a fourth signature smoke column billowing from the roof.

I approached the building from the west and immediately went around it to get to the eastern side where our room was situated. I dreaded the fate of the rest of my team that would be revealed. I was suddenly afraid to take the last turn that concealed the truth I sought.

Like a little child observing some game rules, I decided to take the turn with my eyes closed and once on the other side, to open them. I believed that it would be less painful to open my eyes and be confronted with the complete picture of the devastation caused by the enemy bombs than to witness the same in small bits at a time.

I defended my logic by drawing a parallel with a man who is to be amputated above the knee. It would be less painful to have one clean chop

at the point you want the leg amputated than to chop the toes first, followed by the foot, then the shin, followed by the knee, and finally the desired position on the thigh. The second option would bring renewed and intensified pain at every stage. I was convinced my theory was valid, and as stupid as it appeared, I went along with it. To make sure I had taken the turn, I walked with my left hand on the wall until I felt the sharp edge of the corner of the building. I took another ten steps in the direction of our room before I opened my eyes.

One, two, three ... seven, eight, nine, and ten! When I did, I was shocked beyond belief. I remained rooted where I stood for a long minute, not able to comprehend the magnitude of the devastation caused by the enemy bombs. I closed and opened my eyes again, but the picture did not change. This was no fantasy, it was real. There was nothing, absolutely nothing. No evidence of death or injuries to my team or any other comrade for that matter, just nothing. I shook my head in disbelief and a cold sweat crept down my spine. Never before had I seen such complete devastation, not even in my wildest dreams.

The ground beneath my feet began to cave in, and I quickly jumped back before I was swallowed by the terrifying emptiness. Where once there was a building which, until this morning, we regarded as our operational centre, there was now nothing, just a gaping hole left behind by a one-tonne or even two-tonne bomb dropped from an enemy plane. I doubted the Rhodesian air force had bombers capable of delivering such huge tonnage. The bomber must have come from apartheid South Africa. The bomb had obliterated any evidence that a building ever existed and the hole it left behind devoured everything contained in that building in its dark belly. Had I taken the eleventh step, I would also have fallen prey to its insatiable appetite. If any member of my team had been where our small building stood when this bomb fell, I would never find out, for not a trace of evidence was left behind. What was clear to me, though, was that the bomb had not been meant for our little building, but for the warehouse. Had it not missed the target, at least a third of the warehouse and the food contained therein would have been completely destroyed.

The only direction I had not been to was to the south where the entrance into the warehouse was located. It was also the direction from which Kelvin and I had arrived when we came in the morning. The lorry still stood where we had seen it and most of the cargo that it carried had not been off-loaded.

Now, added to its cargo, were the bodies of four comrades who had fallen victim to the enemy bombs, slumped over the cargo they were meant to offload. These were the comrades I had quipped with when I arrived early in the morning, as I hurried past to join my team. The exuberance with which they had greeted me had been replaced by the melancholy of death.

The driver had not been given the opportunity to alight. He died with his left hand on the steering wheel and the right hand still clutching the handle of the partially opened right door. His left foot was half rested on the accelerator pedal while the right foot was hanging partially out of the driver's door. The driver's right shoulder rested on the dashboard, and together with the left foot and the right hand, they supported his body and the bit of his head that still remained.

Knowing the warehouse was still a viable enemy target, it was foolhardy and inadvisable for anyone to go inside it. However, the courage I had seen on Daniel's face, and the urging of his three dying words, were motivating me; to fail to enter the warehouse for fear of the continuing enemy bombardment would be tantamount to surrendering the struggle and betraying the silent pledge I had given to Daniel. I boldly stepped inside the warehouse.

It was a gigantic structure, about eighty metres long and thirty metres wide. Its walls were constructed from cement bricks, reinforced at the corners by steel bars. The roof was of asbestos sheets that allowed natural light through. The floor was smoothly plastered and was divided into fourteen equal sections. A two-metre wide middle passage down the length of the warehouse divided the building into two. Each of the halves was further divided into seven equal sections, with the sections separated by a one-metre passage. All the demarcations were permanently marked by green paint, making the floor of the warehouse look like a game I used to play when I was young that we called 'Get In'.

Each section had its corresponding number clearly marked in red paint. Starting from the main entrance, sections to the left had odd numbers and sections to the right had even numbers. To retrieve any item you would need to know on which section it was packed. At the end of the building there were two offices, one for keeping records and the other for control clerks. The offices each had a door leading from the middle passage and each had a glass window. At the northern end of the passage there was an emergency exit.

The main entrance to the warehouse had a five-metre wide sliding door of corrugated sheets, from where goods were loaded or offloaded. It was outside this door that the lorry was parked when the attack began. Sometimes, light trucks (up to five tonnes) could be driven into the warehouse for loading or offloading.

Visibility inside the warehouse was poor. Electrical lights had been cut off and the natural light through the roof was obscured by smoke as a result of the bombings. Coming from the bright light outside, my eyes needed time to adjust. I strained them to see as I made my way down the middle passage and, at the same time, dragged my feet on the floor to try and detect any obstacles. Even with the limited visibility, I could tell that sections one and two were empty.

I was approaching the horizontal passage separating sections one and two from sections three and four when my right foot hit an obstacle and I began to stumble. I instinctively repositioned my left foot in an effort to regain my balance. The effort was wasted. My left foot slipped and I began to fall. In a desperate effort to break the fall, I stretched my left hand far forward so that I could use it to prop up my body from the ground. The weight of the body and the inertia of the fall were too much for one hand. My right hand that was holding the gun wanted to come to the assistance of the left hand, but the gun sling hooked on to the obstacle beneath and prevented it. Like a sack of potatoes, my body slumped over the obstacle and the palm of my left hand came to rest in some slippery liquid substance on the floor.

My vision had now improved a little and I realised the obstacle I had fallen over was the dead body of a comrade and the liquid substance was his blood. As I disentangled my gun sling from the head of the dead comrade, I noticed there was another body lying in section two. Since there was no damage to the portion of the roof directly above where these two comrades had died, and the walls surrounding them appeared undamaged from the inside, I concluded that they had received injuries from bomb fragments outside, but managed to stagger or crawl into the warehouse where they collapsed and died.

As I advanced on to sections three and four, my eyes had fully adjusted to the dim lighting in the warehouse and I could easily see that, like sections one and two, these sections were empty too. There were no dead or injured comrades on the floor of these sections.

I carried on to sections five and six. Section five had about eighteen cartons containing assorted juices. These cartons had been offloaded from the lorry that was parked outside. Only a third of the surface area covered by section five had been filled with cartons and the other two-thirds were empty. There was no sign of dead or injured comrades. Section six had been filled with cartons containing biscuits. Some of the cartons had collapsed onto the passage separating section six from section four. At least a dozen of the cartons had been shredded by a bomb and their contents pulverized. Smoke was coming from the torn cartons and smouldering biscuits. A big hole in the roof directly above section six exposed the entry point of the bomb. My quick inspection of the section revealed no casualties.

I walked down the middle passage separating section seven from section eight and everything seemed to be normal. Both sections had food containers covering their total surface areas. The roof directly above them had no holes from bombs or bullets. As I came in line with the horizontal passage separating section eight from section ten, I did notice that some bags of maize meal seemed to have fallen from their location in section ten and blocked off about a metre and a half of the passage from the wall. It seemed strange that these bags had fallen because there was no evidence of a bomb having fallen on section eight or ten. Besides, none of the bags containing the maize meal had been ruptured. I was contemplating whether to investigate further this oddity when a bomb exploded somewhere in the area of sections one to four.

Although I was not affected by the explosion, it nonetheless highlighted the danger I was exposed to as long as I remained in the targeted warehouse. I gave up on further investigating the maize bags and decided to press on with the search for casualties in the remainder of the building so that I could vacate it as quickly as possible.

From the centre passage I turned left into the horizontal passage separating section seven from section nine. Section nine was packed with bags of rice. Directly above this section, the roof had been partially collapsed by a bomb. Grains of rice were strewn on the passage. It seemed to me that the greatest impact of the bomb had been towards the horizontal passage separating section nine from section eleven. On the side where I was, there were no casualties. I turned to the centre passage so that I could proceed to the other side of section nine.

I heard a suppressed cough. It was barely audible but my ears had been trained to detect the slightest hint of any sound. What rather confused me was that it seemed to come from the sections I had covered already and where I was positive I had not missed a thing. I strained my ears hard in the hope that the sound would be repeated. I was convinced that I was not the only living human in this building, and yet I could not solve the puzzle of where the other or others could be located. Was the cough from a friend or foe? That was another missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle.

Before I entered this building I had periodically been monitoring the sky and I had seen no evidence of a parachute drop. Unless, of course, a drop occurred during the few minutes I had been in the warehouse. The probability of this happening was almost negligible. However, the probability theory states that “if something can go wrong, one day it will go wrong.” There was also the remote possibility the enemy would, in conjunction with an aerial attack, launch a motorized attack on Chimoio.

Preposterous as the idea might sound, considering the enemy would have to drive through FRELIMO garrisons in order to reach the ZANLA Headquarters, it was not without precedent. In 1976, a courageous and well-respected ZANLA operational commander known as Nyathi defected. Before news of the defection had filtered back to the rear base, the Rhodesian army quickly capitalised on this windfall. They assembled a crack force of about 20 soldiers and, in armoured vehicles identical to those used by Mozambican soldiers, they drove past FRELIMO garrisons without arousing suspicion until they reached Nyadzonya, a camp holding about two thousand refugees from Rhodesia at the time.

While having the status of refugees, the vast majority of the occupants of the camp did not wish to be permanent refugees in Mozambique. To them, Nyadzonya was a transit base before they could be sent for military training in Mozambique or Tanzania. A token number of ZANLA commanders administered the camp, but were barred by Mozambican authorities from keeping firearms as this would compromise the refugee status of the camp.

Occasionally, Mozambican authorities in the company of some ZANLA commanders would bring lorries to ferry selected personnel to go for military training. The camp administrators were usually informed a week in advance to prepare a list of those who would go for training. On this particular occasion, Nyathi, leading a crack Rhodesian force comprising black soldiers and white soldiers, with faces painted black to resemble their

black colleagues, arrived at Nyadzonya just before dawn in some armoured vehicles mounted with heavy machineguns. Quickly and quietly they killed the two unarmed guards at an outpost that controlled entry into the camp, before they could alert anyone about the unannounced ‘visitors’.

Having gained entry, Nyathi who had been to the camp on several occasions in the past and was a well-known ‘comrade’ who commanded tremendous respect amongst the administrators for his valour and battlefield achievements, left his band of assassins deployed at the parade ground and walked to the hut where the camp commander stayed. He explained to the camp commander that he had come with Mozambican officials to collect some recruits for military training. The camp commander argued that they had not been given prior notice that some recruits would be taken and the selection and listing of prospective candidates had not been undertaken. Nyathi apologised for the lack of advance warning but persuasively explained that the top ZANLA leadership had also been surprised to learn that a Tanzanian ship that had brought supplies for the Mozambican government was docked at Beira harbour, and had been instructed to bring with it ZANLA recruits when it returned to Tanzania. This ship was scheduled to return that same evening, hence the urgency and the reason why they had come in the early hours of morning.

After hasty consultations with members of his staff, the camp commander saw no reason to doubt Nyathi’s word. The commander blew the emergency whistle and within five to ten minutes all the refugees were on parade.

The presence of Mozambican vehicles excited rather than frightened the refugees. Some had witnessed two or more groups of refugees leave for training. Each one of those assembled entertained the hope that this would be their lucky day. If there was any disappointment, it was because the trucks that had come looked small and would not be able to carry many of them. Perhaps this was just an advance fleet and many more would follow.

Ten to fifteen minutes after the whistle was blown, the section commanders had reported to their platoon commanders the attendance figures of their respective sections. The platoon commanders having reconciled the attendance figures of their sections were waiting to report these to their company commanders, who in turn would give their company figures to their respective battalion commanders. The whole parade

maintained a strict silence that only the commanders reporting their figures could break.

Then the silence was broken. Not by the reporting commanders, but by the sound of a pistol fired in the air and a clear order barked by Nyathi to the Rhodesian assassins to “kill the terrorists.” The armoured vehicles roared into life, their guns spitting death and destruction wherever their bullets landed. Pandemonium broke loose. Screams of fear, panic and pain, mingled with the hungry echoes of the machine guns mounted on the armoured vehicles, setting the stage for the genocide being committed. The vehicles advanced onto the parade ground, mowing down any human obstacles that could not quickly escape their murderous hunt. They then formed a fighting formation to drive the still surviving but frightened refugees away from them, into the deep and treacherous Nyadzonya River where scores perished. Unsatisfied by the countless deaths his betrayal had cost, Nyathi ordered the vehicles to roll over the dead bodies on the parade ground because “some of them are feigning death”.

Like a bolt of lightning, this memory of what took place at Nyadzonya the previous year flashed through my mind. The possibility of history being repeated did not bring any fear of a possible ground attack, but instead strengthened my spirit and resolve to avenge the deaths of those killed at Nyadzonya, the deaths of Daniel and Kelvin, the deaths of all those who had died for the cause of freedom and independence. What about the parents, brothers and sisters inside Rhodesia who were persecuted daily by a brutal and racist regime for supporting the armed struggle, and who were tormented by the thought of whether they would see their children alive again, the brothers and sisters who had left to join the armed struggle.

With my renewed resolve I knew I could not inspect the remainder of the warehouse without first confirming the source of the cough I had heard. My thoughts returned to the collapsed bags partially blocking the passage separating section eight from section ten. I examined the collapsed bags more closely and was convinced that the solution to my puzzle lay on the other side of the wall of collapsed bags.

I cocked my gun and shouted boldly, “Anyone behind these bags identify yourself and come out with your hands up.”

There was no answer. Had my intuition let me down? Maybe I had imagined the cough. I decided to give it another go.

“This is Comrade Dragon. I know you are there behind these bags, identify yourselves and come out with your hands raised. I give you exactly one minute and if you don’t respond I shall throw a grenade over your heads.”

It was a bluff. I did not have any grenade on me, but the trick worked.

“Please hold it Comrade Dragon; it’s me Captain Devil and Fadzai Magamba. We also have three other comrades, I don’t know their names.” His voice was trembling with fear.

“All of you climb over the bags to this side. Leave your guns behind and no monkey business. Anyone with a weapon I will shoot, do you hear me?” I ordered. This was just a safety precaution in case there was a traitor amongst them.

They climbed over the bags to my side with Captain Devil leading. All of them wore frightened expressions and tried to avoid my accusing gaze.

“Captain Devil and you, Fadzai Magamba, is this how you operate at home, cowering in a hole when others are engaging the enemy?” I berated the two members of my team, the first ones I now knew had survived the early waves of enemy bombardment. Out of the six comrades I had withdrawn from operations in Rhodesia to join my team, I now had accounted for three. Comrade Ridzai Bazooka had been killed by a bomb while trying to run away from the enemy without offering resistance. Now comrades Captain Devil and Fadzai Magamba had barricaded themselves behind bags of maize meal in an effort to hide away from the enemy, when outside some comrades were offering real resistance. The example these three had set revealed the lack of commitment and effectiveness of some of our operational commanders.

Having satisfied myself that the five comrades were no direct threat to other comrades, but victims of uncontrolled fear, I ordered them to get their weapons and join me in completing the search for casualties in the remainder of the huge warehouse. What was evident to me was that they needed very firm control if they were to overcome their fear and play a useful role in resisting and confronting the enemy’s aggression.

A bomb had entered above section fourteen destroying a large quantity of tinned food that filled the whole of this section. Fortunately, there was no one in the section when the bomb fell. The last evidence of a bomb blast was the roof above the office used by control clerks. In this office three comrades lay dead and four were seriously injured. We quickly improvised

stretchers and carried the wounded out of the warehouse to a spot we chose underneath a big tree which provided cover from both the hot weather and detection from enemy aircraft. The dead, for now, had to remain where they fell. The search for survivors in the gigantic warehouse had ended.

For the first time since the bombardment began in the early morning hours, I had not bothered to check the time. The activity in the air and the tasks I had set myself on the ground, denied me the opportunity to think about time. Twelve forty, my watch read! I could not believe that with all I had been through from the time the enemy bombardment began only about four hours had elapsed. In my mind's eye it could well have been eight hours. Maybe my watch had once again let me down like it did when I woke up in the morning. My Swiss watch was the old generation type that needed winding at least once every thirty-six hours. Several times my watch would stop because I had forgotten to wind it for over forty hours, as it did this morning. As long as one remembered to wind it, it was one of the most reliable watches I had known.

"Captain Devil," I sought confirmation, "what is your time?"

"Twelve forty-two, Sir" he responded after a quick look at his watch.

I re-evaluated the battlefield scenario. Dotted everywhere, many comrades were running, crisscrossing the battlefield, and others, overcome by fatigue, were walking aimlessly, resigned to their fate. Once the enemy succeeded in neutralising any coordinated pockets of resistance, he would start paying more attention to the many random opportunistic targets that I was seeing right now. Before this situation with its attendant consequences could develop, someone had to take charge of this chaotic state of affairs. We had never developed a common defence strategy for the ZANLA Headquarters in the event of such an attack. While some bases mobilised their forces to repulse the enemy attack, others had simply melted away, thereby contributing to the pool of disorganised cadres that littered the battlefield.

Before the attack began, the National Stores Base had a force level of around sixty people and of this number about forty rotated guard duties and the remainder worked as clerks, cooks and cleaners. About a quarter of the base strength had perished at the parade ground during the first wave of bombardments. The rest, including the guards, had simply vanished. The commander of the base had been killed under circumstances I had the

misfortune to witness earlier, neither fighting nor mobilising his forces to fight, but in flight.

I resolved to take charge of the situation. First, I took stock of the forces I could immediately bring under my direct command. In all, there were nine comrades – the two sector commissars recently withdrawn from operations in Rhodesia to join my commissariat team, three comrades whose backgrounds or names I did not know yet, and four stretcher cases with varying degrees of injury. The combat readiness of the forces under my command was just over 50%. Their combat effectiveness, considering the state in which they had been discovered – cowering behind bags of maize meal – was deplorable to say the least. However, in the majority of cases, a force is as effective as the commander who leads it. My primary and immediate task was thus to mould this unit of five able-bodied men into an effective fighting force. I ordered the five healthy comrades to assemble about thirty metres away from the tree underneath which we had laid and camouflaged the four injured comrades.

My address to the five comrades had to be short, sharp and to the point because of the ongoing enemy activities in the air.

“Who amongst the five of you has not received military training?” No response.

“Good. Can I take your silence to mean you have all been trained?” The response was a mixture of nodding and verbal affirmations. I had expected to have only verbal responses, but I chose not to make an issue out of this.

“All of you are a disgrace to our struggle, and a betrayal of our fallen heroes. Their blood is on your hands. Were you trained and armed to hide away from the enemy? Oh Dear Lord! Why did you cause your parents pain and anguish coming to join the struggle when you are all sissies waiting to be butchered without a fight.” I was seething with anger as I castigated them for their cowardice.

As I berated the five comrades, my gaze shifted from one to the other and finally settled on two – Comrades Captain Devil and Fadzai Magamba. So intense and piercing was my focus on them that the other three comrades seemed to fade away from my vision.

“You two disgraceful heaps of rubbish, not only are you trained combatants, but you are senior operational commanders just recently withdrawn from the battlefield. Is this the way you command your troops in battle – cowering away from the enemy? Your rightful place is before a

court martial, and your deserved sentence – death by firing squad”, I vented my anger on the two comrades who earlier today were a part of my team that was now disbanded as a result of enemy action.

“What example are you setting for the other comrades who have never been to the battlefield?” The question joggled my brain to register the presence of the other three comrades standing close to Captain Devil and Fadzai Magamba, whom I had inexplicably failed to bring into focus.

I addressed the one standing nearest to me. “You miserable looking nincompoop, are you a comrade or a Selous Scout.”

“A real comrade, Comrade Dragon.”

“And your name?”

“Tambudzai Mabhunu (Molest the Boers).”

“And you molest them by hiding behind bags of maize meal?” I retorted.

“And you, buffoon?” I enquired, shifting my gaze from Comrade Tambudzai Mabhunu to the comrade standing next to him.

“I am Comrade Tererai Midzimu (Heed the Spirits).”

“And do you heed the advice of Mbuya Nehanda and our other spirit mediums?”

“I try to ...”

I did not bother to hear him finish his response, but instead addressed the third comrade.

“And you, confused cockroach?”

“My name is Tongai Zimbabwe (Rule Zimbabwe), Comrade Dragon.”

“Who? The Boers?”

“No Comrade Dragon, I want ZANU...” Before Comrade Tongai could finish his sentence, we heard the sound of an approaching aircraft, and the five comrades took to their heels without a second thought.

“Idiots! Stop right where you are or I will shoot you!” My cold, menacing voice bellowed out like a clap of thunder, inducing a greater fear than that caused by the sound of an approaching enemy plane. “Stand upright and still where you are. If you make a slight movement, the enemy will easily detect your presence.”

The five comrades froze where they were, more out of fear of being killed by a comrade’s bullet than obedience to an order. After the plane had flown past, I called the comrades to come close to where I stood.

“Listen to me very, very carefully,” my voice was measured and even more menacing, “anyone who turns his back against the enemy is, by

default, an agent of the enemy, deserving the same treatment befitting the enemy. You were not trained to be cowards. The virulence of cowardliness shall not be tolerated or allowed to spread. Not in our struggle! From now on, you will act and behave like brave fighters, deserving the accolades of our suffering masses for being true liberators.”

I paused and surveyed their faces to determine whether my message was registering at all in their brains. Judging by their attentiveness, the message had struck a chord in their ear and hopefully not gone out through the other.

Taking advantage of the encouraging signs, I pressed on with my message. “For the sake of our struggling masses and our quest for freedom and independence, I now appoint myself the judge, the jury and the executioner over any comrade who chooses to further the cause of the enemy through fear and panic. Anyone who chooses not to heed my words provides me with the unique opportunity to demonstrate and prove my resolve.”

In boxing, when you deliver a lethal blow to your adversary and the adversary is momentarily dazed, a professional fighter will exploit this opportunity and quickly move in with a knockout punch. I did just that.

“Those amongst you who are committed to the armed struggle and want to swear that from henceforth they shall never again be intimidated by the enemy come and join hands with me. Do not come if you do not mean it or are not sure of yourself, for the price of betrayal is certain death.”

Without any hesitation they all came forward and we put our hands together, one over the other, and swore eternal allegiance to our Party, our President, and the successful execution of our struggle. We committed ourselves never to turn our backs against the enemy, no matter how powerful he might appear to be. That said, we stood quietly together in that same position, and each and every one, bonded together, experienced an exhilarating feeling of oneness and comradeship like we had never known before.

We were in that position when we heard the sound of an approaching plane. None amongst us moved. I watched the expressions on their faces and was delighted to see no trace of fear on any of them. The plane flew past over our heads, delivered its lethal payload at the warehouse, only a few metres in front of us, and continued its flight past the warehouse, before banking to the left as it began to retrace its path back to Rhodesia.

I was the first to break the silence. “Hooray! Let us together now, without fear, march forward and vanquish the enemy.”

The next twenty to thirty minutes were spent in organisational details and battlefield orders. I appointed Comrade Captain Devil to be section commander of the nine-man section comprising five able-bodied and four disabled comrades. I made Comrade Fadzai Magamba his second-incommand. The immediate task for Captain Devil was to detach and lead two members of his section to go in search of the panic-stricken comrades traversing the battlefield in an effort to escape or hide away from the enemy. All those mobilised were to be brought to our new Operational Headquarters (Op. HQ), our present location, for a quick orientation and placement into cohesive fighting units. Unless and until this was done, the disorganised comrades would, one by one, perish at the hands of the enemy. The injured comrades were to be brought to the Op. HQ with the assistance of the mobilised able-bodied comrades, if they could not walk on their own. No injured comrade, no matter how severe the injuries, could be left behind.

Fadzai Magamba was to remain with one able-bodied comrade. Their primary task was to fend for the injured comrades and ensure they were fed and given lots of juice to prevent dehydration. The security of the Op. HQ was in their hands and they had to pay special attention to guarantee there was no unauthorised entry into the warehouse. The command structure and roles of the fighters would be reviewed periodically as and when our force levels increased.

After assigning responsibilities to my budding force, I decided it was time that I took stock of the unfolding developments. First, I wanted to personally observe the degree of injuries of my four wounded comrades. I moved towards the big tree under which we had laid and camouflaged them and was satisfied that the camouflage we had hastily provided was effective in shielding them from the prying eyes of the enemy high above in the sky as well as from the piercing rays of the sun that occasionally broke through the clouds.

I then caught a glimpse of Comrade Fadzai Magamba and the comrade under his direct command, as they disappeared into the warehouse. It was funny I thought to myself, that they had prioritised getting food and drinks even before they had inspected the injured comrades in order to determine their individual requirements. Just as quickly as the thought had entered my

mind, the rationale for their actions became obvious to me – their priority was to fill their own stomachs first.

The four injured comrades were laid around a big tree, about five metres from each other. The dispersion was intended to minimise further injuries in the event that the enemy bombed the position. The first comrade I visited had sustained serious injuries to both his legs and was suffering excruciating pain. He begged me to use my gun to end his life because he could not stand the pain. His pleas were stabs to my wounded soul. I resisted the urge to cry, put up a brave face and assured him that everything would be okay. I promised to bring him pain killers or a sedative quickly to relieve him of the pain and further assured him that at the first available opportunity he would be evacuated to Chimoio town or Gondola* where there were better medical facilities.

All of our bases had a clinic staffed by qualified medical assistants. In addition, every trained fighter was given training in basic first aid and could treat common illnesses and minor battlefield injuries. Operations and other complicated medical procedures were referred to the main medical base known as Parirenyatwa, named after Dr Samuel Tichafa Parirenyatwa¹. This base had three modern and well-equipped mobile theatres and there were at least two qualified doctors available at any time to deal with emergencies. Obviously, the enemy would have targeted Parirenyatwa Base as one of its primary targets and taking our injured there was out of the question and suicidal too.

The clinic at the National Stores Base was a small, detached building that was of no significance to an enemy whose preoccupation was the complete destruction of the large warehouse. Since the attack had begun, the clinic had so far been spared.

As I went to the second casualty, I saw Comrade Fadzai Magamba and the comrade who had accompanied him emerge from the warehouse. I shouted to Comrade Fadzai to go to our clinic and bring some morphine and bandages. He was to give the comrade I had just seen a 5ml dosage of the sedative and bandage his wounds.

I at first mistook the second casualty, a female comrade, for a boy because of her short hair and the camouflage trousers and shirt that she wore. A closer look at her breasts, the lipstick and the earrings she wore, put her sexual identity beyond doubt. Her right hand had almost been severed just above the elbow and only a thin membrane connected it to the

rest of the body. She had bled profusely and blood was still oozing from her shattered arm. The girl was sliding into unconsciousness. I could not control my emotions. Ian Douglas Smith and his surrogates – Muzorewa, Sithole and Chirau – were responsible for causing all this pain and suffering. I swore, I promised revenge, and I said a silent prayer for retribution.

I looked at the girl and her face showed no pain, her breathing was reasonably strong and stable. “Where there is life, there is hope,” I thought to myself. I steadied my nerves and did what I had to do. I thrust my right hand into my pocket and took out a penknife that I always carried with me. With my left hand, I took the girl’s lifeless hand and lifted the arm to reveal the membrane that connected it to the rest of the body, and boldly cut off the arm from the rest of the body. Then I tore the girl’s shirt and without any consideration to hygiene, used it as a temporary measure to stop the bleeding. I then called to Comrade Fadzai, who by now was sedating the first comrade, to quickly finish what he was doing and then come and properly dress the girl’s wound. Little did I know then that my resolute action had saved the girl’s life.

I moved to the third casualty but could not detect any movement. I knelt down beside the comrade and took his arm in order to feel his pulse. The effort was wasted as rigor mortis was already setting in. I left the body where it lay and moved on to the fourth position.

This female comrade had a deep gash on her right thigh which was causing her a lot of pain. The wound had stopped bleeding and, in comparison with the other two cases, her condition was relatively better and not life threatening. I had a short conversation with her in which I tried to lift her spirits and assure her that everything would be okay. She showed tremendous courage and in between gasps of pain, managed to force a smile or two. I left her after making arrangements for her to receive first aid and some food.

We had finished attending to the injured when Captain Devil returned. He had managed to round up and bring with him seventeen comrades, of whom two were stretcher cases and four were walking wounded. I was reasonably happy with the progress. I told Captain Devil to continue his efforts in rounding up more and more comrades and in the meantime I would address those comrades he had brought, motivate them and organise them into a credible fighting force. Captain Devil, accompanied by comrades Tererai Midzimu and Tambudzai Mabhunu went back to continue their hunt.

Before addressing the newcomers, I chose another tree, not very far from the one under which we had laid and camouflaged the first four wounded comrades (now three after one had died). We carried the two new stretcher cases and laid and camouflaged them beneath this big tree.

I then ordered the other fifteen comrades to assemble and, as I did with the pioneer group, motivated the new arrivals to have courage to confront the enemy. If we continued to run in panic and fear, the enemy would hunt us down one by one until we all perished, I stressed. I told them of the courage I had seen on Daniel's face early in the morning and his dying words to continue the struggle. I urged them to take up the gauntlet as I had committed myself to do before our dying young hero. True, every man or woman, including the seemingly formidable enemy, experiences fear. The difference between bravery and cowardice is the ability or inability to overcome fear. If we demonstrated courage by conquering fear we would, in so doing, drive fear and panic right into the heart of the enemy.

As I continued to motivate the comrades I heard the distant sound of a plane and looked up into the sky. The plane was hurtling towards the ground, engulfed in flames. "Look up and see," I shouted in ecstatic delight. "That orange ball you see," pointing to the burning plane, "is the embodiment of the courage of some of our comrades!" I found out later that this Rhodesian jet crash landed at Vanduzi Crossroads, not far from Chimoio, and the pilot was killed in the crash.

Satisfied that I had fired the comrades with a new determination to fight and defeat the enemy, I set about outlining our strategy for achieving the goal.

As soon as Captain Devil returned I was going to reorganise the force into effective fighting units. In the meantime, I wanted to know whether amongst them there were medical assistants. I was relieved to hear there were two experienced medics and I appointed the more senior of the two a section commander and the other, his second-in-command. Under their care were the three injured comrades taken from the warehouse, the two stretcher cases recently brought by Captain Devil, and the four new arrivals with minor injuries.

The medics and the four with slight injuries were to ensure that the stretcher cases were well looked after through provision of medicines and food. The comrades with major injuries were to be prepared for possible evacuation to Chimoio town or Gondola when evening fell. While we

waited for Captain Devil to return, I asked comrades Fadzai Magamba and Tongai Zimbabwe to deploy the uncommitted eleven comrades in defensive positions around our injured comrades. I went to a secluded spot to give myself the uninterrupted opportunity to reflect on the day's events.

There was still coordinated resistance coming from the direction of Takawira Base 2, Takawira Base 1, and the Headquarters. This to me was a source of inspiration. But my spirits sank when I surveyed the expanse of the battlefield and saw, dotted everywhere, the continuing and confused flight of many comrades. I consoled myself with the thought that this confusion that was a sore both to my eyes and my mind, was in fact, the pool from which I would build my force for the defence of Chimoio.

I looked at my watch and it was just after three in the afternoon, and I was thinking to myself that Captain Devil should be back any moment now. I lay on my back and tried to relax a little. The feeling of the AK-47 by my side gave me comfort and confidence. My mind began to be preoccupied with the thought of how I would use my force which, I hoped, would number around a hundred by the end of the day. At the same time as I was formulating my strategy, my eyes kept scanning the sky and noting the presence and frequency of the enemy flights as they crisscrossed above the length and breadth of our numerous bases.

The pattern was the same – a plane would come armed with bombs, drop them on a predetermined target or, if such target could not be identified, on an opportunistic target, and fly back to Rhodesia. In my idle observation of the enemy's *modus operandi*, I saw two planes flying towards our bases. Just before crossing our airspace, they started dropping their bombs, one after the other. It made no sense at all, but I thought perhaps they had seen a large group of comrades going in the direction of Chimoio town and found it too tempting to ignore for the sake of a fixed, predetermined target. I could have gone along with this logic had the planes not resumed dropping their 'silent' bombs in quick succession – two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve... I stopped counting and panicked. These were not bombs, they were paratroopers!

My panic was not out of fear for myself, but out of grave concern for the lives of many of the comrades. The logical direction of flight when attacked was in the direction of Chimoio town. It was highly unlikely that the enemy would pursue his prey up to, or close to the town, for fear of provoking the Mozambican army into joining the confrontation. The majority of the

comrades continued to go where logic told them to go, oblivious to the deployment of enemy paratroopers.

Most successful military strategists defy logic. They put themselves in the position of their adversary and deduce what their natural reaction to a situation would be. By behaving in a manner that is contrary to the wisdom of logic, they create surprise, a key element for success. The enemy's gamble seemed to have worked. His audacious deployment did not provoke any reaction from the Mozambican forces based in Chimoio town, and further, as I continued to study the battlefield scenario, it was evident that most comrades had not seen the deployment of the enemy paratroopers. The comrades continued to run towards Chimoio town in a direction that would bring them head-on with the Rhodesian special forces.

I was deep in a mood of melancholy introspection when Captain Devil reported back. He had managed to gather an additional twenty-eight ablebodied comrades, bringing our force to fifty-three. After a quick politicisation of the new arrivals, I organised my force into a platoon and elevated Comrade Captain Devil to the position of platoon commander, with Comrade Fadzai Magamba as second in command. The platoon had four sections. The section that included the injured comrades remained as I had recently constituted it. All the other comrades were placed in three sections and I promoted comrades Tambudzai Magamba, Tererai Midzimu and Tongai Zimbabwe to each command a section.

Even before Captain Devil had returned, I had finalised in my mind how I wanted my forces to be deployed. I called Captain Devil and Fadzai Magamba aside to discuss the implementation of my plans. There were three overriding objectives. The first was to protect the lives of the comrades by preventing them from using the escape route leading to the lurking danger of the Rhodesian paratroopers. Secondly, to protect the strategic food reserves at the National Stores by preventing continued air bombardments or any possible ground attack on the warehouse. The third objective was to evacuate casualties from the battlefield to safer havens.

To achieve the first objective I wanted a section to be permanently deployed in the general area used to escape to Chimoio for as long as the attack on our bases continued. Their role would be to warn the comrades about the Rhodesian paratroopers and direct them to come to the National Stores to link up with my forces.

The second objective required that the enemy planes be engaged before they dropped their bombs on the warehouse. Food was a strategic commodity and during the past two years it had been very scarce. It takes a lot of effort and time to mobilise and obtain food reserves, as well as items of clothing. Unless we preserved the stocks we already had, we ran the risk of starvation in the period just after the end of hostilities. The forces that would be involved in this ‘offensive defence’ must not take positions close to where the wounded were laid. No random firing would be tolerated. Opening and halting of fire must be according to orders given by commanders. Commanders could only give the order to open fire when the planes were within shooting range. After engaging enemy planes, the forces were to re-deploy in a different position to prevent the enemy fixing the comrades’ positions in their bombing runs.

The third objective sought to ameliorate the pain and suffering endured by the injured comrades by rendering appropriate medical and psychological attention, and at the earliest possible opportunity, evacuating them to Chimoio town or Gondola where they would have better medical care.

I left the fulfilment of the first and second objectives entirely in the hands of my commanders. This gave me the opportunity to reflect on the bigger picture. Was the enemy going to continue the attack the following day? I hoped not, but feared for the worst. If he was going to continue, there was likely to be an increase in bombardments and a possible widening of the use of ground forces. Judging from experience gained in the battlefields at home, the enemy planes did not have night fighting capabilities. Therefore, by last light, there should be an end to all enemy activities in the air. In the event that the attack ended today, we would need to take stock of casualty figures and damage to property and equipment, beginning early next morning. There was also an urgent need to bury our dead, as their bodies would deteriorate quickly in the hot conditions.

Supposing the enemy chose to continue his attack, what targets were likely to interest him most? The National Stores, from which I had established a line of defence, was one such target. The HQ itself, as the nerve centre that accommodated the most senior military commanders, and from where our national strategy for the fight against the Rhodesian regime was crafted, had the psychological importance of being the flagship for ZANLA and the place where top secret operational documents were

expected to be kept. If the enemy wanted to use ground forces against our bases, this would probably be the most preferred target in order to capture senior ZANLA commander/s and confiscate sensitive operational documents. Parirenyatwa Base had our biggest hospital and among its patients were comrades who had sustained injuries at the battlefield and could be a reservoir of intelligence for the enemy. The base had very expensive equipment which the enemy would delight in destroying.

The base I hoped and prayed the enemy would never discover was our National Armoury. All the weaponry, ammunition and other equipment for all our military operations originated from this base. Important as it was, it was the least known base to the majority of the comrades, including myself. The exact location of the base was a well-guarded secret. The general area where it was located was a large expanse of woodlands and undulating hills stretching for kilometres, which was out of bounds to all except for the very few who were security cleared to enter the base. The comrades who guarded the base were specially trained abroad and security-vetted, and were not allowed to go out of the base to mix with other comrades.

If you consider that I was a senior commander (Member of General Staff) within the ranks of ZANLA, and yet I had no knowledge of the actual location of the National Armoury, it demonstrates how secret the base was. Neither did we know the force strength in this base. All supplies or resupplies of weapons or ammunition were done through an intermediary base that represented the furthest limit to which all other comrades were allowed to go. It was at this intermediary base that Kelvin had sought permission in the morning to go and obtain a rifle for my temporary use, a journey from which he never returned.

As my mind analysed the ongoing developments, I kept reminding myself that it would be a tragedy if the National Armoury were discovered. So far, I was convinced it had not been, because we would have heard loud explosions as the enemy was sure to destroy any large stockpiles of arms and munitions.

The sun was setting. As it disappeared beyond the hills, so did the planes – like the worker bees protecting the queen bee. The comrades' guns that had barked at the sight of the unwelcome intruders fell silent. There was a deathly quiet in all the bases like I had never experienced before.

Soon it would be dark. I wanted to take stock of the progress we had made during the day, as well as unveiling my plans for the evening before

darkness enveloped the sky. I ordered Comrade Captain Devil to bring me all the commanders, telling them to temporarily relinquish command to their respective second-in-command.

Comrade Captain Devil had been transformed from the cowering coward I had uncovered in the warehouse in the morning into a confident, courageous, and inspiring commander. He outlined the achievements of the forces under his command from the time I assigned him overall command. Our force had now risen from fifty-three to 147, of whom nine had sustained serious injuries and eight had minor injuries. The force level could have been 150, but the last enemy plane to come on a bombing raid at the National Stores received heavy sustained fire from my forces and had to prematurely eject its bombs. The bombs did not reach their intended target but instead dropped on our positions with the seriously injured comrades, instantly killing four.

When the enemy realised there was coordinated resistance at the National Stores, his bombing attacks at this target ended. I had been vindicated in my assertion that to quickly end the battle, we had to engage the enemy vigorously. Except for the section deployed to intercept comrades trying to escape to Chimoio through the route where I had seen Rhodesian paratroopers deploy, all the others were at this base awaiting further orders.

I congratulated all the commanders for acquitting themselves so well during the day. “Through your courage and wise leadership, we have now moulded a credible force that can stand up to any amount of enemy aggression. Should the enemy choose to continue his attack tomorrow, we should not be found wanting in our resolve to defeat him.”

I then announced the promotion of Captain Devil to company commander – a remarkable three promotions in one day. These promotions had a motivational effect on Captain Devil. I empowered him with the responsibility of reorganising the company into platoons and sections as he saw fit during the evening. I also wanted him to immediately detach a platoon consisting of thirty able-bodied comrades, the nine stretcher cases and the eight walking wounded to go to Chindunduma base in Gondola.

The medical section had anticipated my intentions and prepared all the sick for a possible evacuation. By 8.30 pm the platoon had received food rations taken from the warehouse and reported their readiness to move. Captain Devil had appointed Comrade Batanai Vatema (Africans be United) to command the platoon, with Comrade Mabhunu Muchapera as his second

in command. Before their departure I briefed the two platoon commanders that their mission was to leave all the seventeen wounded comrades for further medical attention, before returning to rejoin us at the National Stores base. The platoon was to avoid the more direct route that would take them towards where I had seen the paratroopers deploy.

They were also to approach Chindunduma base with caution as we did not yet know whether it had been attacked. If a normal situation existed at Chindunduma, the platoon could have a warm meal there, take a short rest and, just before dawn, return to rejoin us. I wanted the platoon to return by not later than 6 am as it was likely that the enemy would continue his assault on our bases at first light the following day.

After the platoon escorting the wounded comrades had gone, I left the reorganisation of our forces entirely in the hands of Comrade Captain Devil and went to a secluded spot to review the day's events and the likely scenarios for the following day. I lay down with the hard ground serving as my bed and the trunk of a fallen tree as my pillow. The process of cogitation, if it happened at all, must have lasted a very brief moment, for all I remembered was waking up with a fright from a very deep sleep.

Attack – Day 2

The time on my watch was just after 3 am, I must have slept for about five and a half hours. The rapidity and intensity with which events had unfolded during the past eighteen to nineteen hours left my brain exhausted and confused. Conflicting signals were being transmitted to my brain urging me to sleep and to be awake at the same time. Both signals were equally compelling, leaving my fatigued and confused brain numb and unable to take a decision. I continued to lie on my 'hard bed' in a stupor, unable to decipher whether I was asleep or awake.

The noisy little winged companions that kept me company when I was asleep, punching holes into my skin and draining blood from my body, had increased their harassment. I slapped at them but missed and flinched at selfinflicted pain that drove the stupor out of my brain and forced it to make a decision.

As I scratched the itchy pimples from the mosquito bites, I was now fully awake and my mind alert. There was an eerie silence in the Base and it seemed all the comrades were fast asleep. I decided to inspect the guard positions to find out if the guards, too, were asleep. To my pleasant surprise,

on all the positions I visited the guards were wide awake. I was advancing to the last guard positions when I was challenged to identify myself. The challenger's voice was distinctly familiar. Using the password of the evening I responded to the challenge and then said, expressing my surprise, "I did not expect you to be awake so early."

"In fact I could not and did not sleep the whole evening," responded Captain Devil, "so I decided I should check the alertness of our guards at this early hour. I am glad I did so because the majority of them were asleep in their positions."

I was embarrassed that while I slept Captain Devil had been awake, and now he had beaten me to the task. That's why, of course, on all guard positions the guards had been alert – some had just been woken from their sleep. I lacked the moral authority to blame them for failure to fulfil their duty to expected standards; I too had succumbed to the pressures of the last day.

"Well done Captain Devil, your performance has indeed exceeded my expectations. Well done once again!"

Since the time was just after 4 am, I instructed Captain Devil to wake all the comrades and make sure they were fully prepared to engage the enemy should he choose to continue his attack any time after daybreak.

By 6 am there was a tense expectation that the enemy could again begin attacking us from the air. The deadline I had set for the platoon that escorted the sick to Chindunduma had come and gone, but still they had not returned. Maybe they had overslept and would arrive a little later. Or worse, they could have been intercepted by the enemy's ground forces. Whatever the circumstances, I began worrying about their safety and silently proffered a prayer for their safe return.

The enemy did not disappoint our expectations. At about 6.30 am there were simultaneous attacks on all our bases. Yesterday the attacks had been a complete surprise and our reaction one of panic and pandemonium. Today was a different story altogether. In all our bases where there were armed comrades, there was a spirited and coordinated response to the enemy's aggression. If yesterday the enemy had thought he had destroyed our will to fight, today he was surprised by our courageous determination to defend our flagship. Indeed, today there were no sitting ducks on parade, oblivious of the genocidal massacre about to be unleashed. Yes, today we were ready

and we were motivated and eager to confront the aggressor, no matter how superior.

The ZANLA tradition of courage and resilience today shone through. The enemy took note of the changed circumstances and after the first wave of attacks there was a pause of about two hours as he reassessed his strategy.

Meanwhile I had instructed Captain Devil to increase the number of comrades deployed to intercept the comrades fleeing in the direction of Chimoio. I reasoned that it was only a matter of time before the enemy felt he had saturated his predetermined targets with bombs and his attention would then shift to random opportunistic targets. We had very limited time within which to clear the battlefield of such targets. To suggest that all of these fleeing comrades were cowards would be grossly misleading. The majority of them had no weapons and some of them had not received any training at all. Among those who were armed, most had no prior experience of battle. Given this background, one could not expect the untrained and unarmed to merely stand by and be cannon fodder for the murderous regime. Any notion that the enemy had been subdued was soon dispelled. A blitzkrieg combining fixed wing aircraft and helicopters was unleashed with such ferocity that, even though expected, it still took us by surprise. My worst fears had now been realised and we were certain to suffer more casualties than the day before. The comrades rose to the occasion and responded with tenacity and efficiency to the enemy's onslaught.

After an hour and a half of sustained attacks, the enemy again broke off the action. These pauses gave us the opportunity to replenish our ammunition and reorganise our defences. Important too, the lull in fighting gave us the much needed opportunity to attend to the injured comrades.

During the day, the number of comrades that had been brought under my direct command had continued to climb. Captain Devil, who had seen his rank further elevated to that of a battalion commander, had shown such astounding courage and great command capabilities that I found it difficult to believe he was the same comrade who, yesterday, had displayed quite opposite qualities. I was now comfortable to delegate to him total responsibility for the command and control of the comrades under my direct authority.

Soon it would be sunset. The arrival of evening would bring its protective shield of darkness to provide cover from the enemy's aerial bombardments.

Within the next thirty to forty minutes I should be able to vouch with certainty that the marauding sorties of the enemy had ended for the day. However, that was not to be. Just when I thought I should regroup my commanders to reveal my plans for the evening, I was interrupted by the fast approaching sound of enemy planes. They deposited their lethal payloads and returned to Rhodesia. But the lessons of yesterday had not been missed by the enemy. Each time he came to bomb our base he would be met by a heavy volley of fire. The whole of today the enemy had been dropping bombs from a distance and missing the intended target, the gigantic warehouse. Only once did an enemy bomb hit an unintended target. Having missed the huge target, a bomb fell over a position where a section of our comrades had deployed. Two comrades were instantly killed and another four received minor injuries. In his last assault of the day it seemed the enemy had come only to wish a horrible evening to the living and the promise of an equally horrible tomorrow. I silently wished the enemy the same.

At the end of the day the number of comrades under command had risen dramatically to 640. Of these, 276 were untrained and a further thirty-three had varying degrees of injuries. I wanted both the untrained and the injured to relocate to Chindunduma Base.

The platoon that I assigned to accompany the injured to Chindunduma yesterday had not reported back. I had specifically instructed the commander to be back not later than 6 o'clock in the morning. Now it was nearly seven in the evening and still we had not heard any word about them. Could it be they had walked into an enemy ambush and had been wiped out? There had been a deployment of paratroopers yesterday and these could have changed their location and our platoon could have just walked into their new position. But that seemed improbable. Even if they had fallen victim to a sophisticated and superior enemy, there would at least have been a few survivors to tell the story. I was in no doubt that one or more of such survivors could have managed to return to base with news of such a tragic occurrence. Besides, we would have heard the sound of gunfire if a fire fight had taken place. Or could it be that when they got to Chindunduma they walked into a base that had been overrun by the enemy and were either killed or captured. Again this was an unlikely scenario, bearing in mind that the platoon had trained and armed comrades who could have put up a brave fight.

Finding no plausible reason for the failure of the platoon to return, I then laid the blame on myself. I shouldn't have sent the platoon with inexperienced commanders. Given so many unknowns, I should have commanded the platoon myself.

Today I would not repeat the mistake. The stakes were too high – 276 untrained and thirty-three injured comrades, then add about twenty armed escorts and the total would come to 329. I gathered my commanders and told them of my decision to accompany the untrained and injured comrades to Chindunduma. Should anything happen to me and I failed to return, Captain Devil was to assume my position and all my responsibilities.

There was visible anxiety amongst my men when I bid them farewell and promised that, barring some unforeseen misfortune, I should be back by first light the following morning.

Previous experience had taught me that night navigation can be a hazardous and treacherous undertaking. Under normal circumstances, it would take us about three and half hours to walk to Gondola. From Gondola it would take just about twenty minutes to walk to Chindunduma base. Today the circumstances were abnormal. Yesterday, I had seen enemy paratroopers deploy in positions that effectively blocked the use of our direct link with Chindunduma. There was no way of telling now whether the enemy still held or had withdrawn from these positions. To be on the safe side, we were going to use a circuitous route that would circumvent the obvious suspect positions.

At first we headed west, a direction almost opposite where we wanted to go. After travelling for about forty minutes, we veered in a north-westerly direction. I knew the terrain well and even in darkness I could tell where to expect obstacles. We were about an hour away from our destination when one of the medics informed me that the condition of one of our comrades had deteriorated. I halted our advance and went to see the reported serious case. The comrade was both feverish and muttering gibberish. I tried to calm him down and to assure him that in an hour's time he would receive the best possible medical attention at Gondola. There was no sign whatsoever that he listened to or heard what I was saying, as he continued to gibber away in his incomprehensible language. I wasn't even sure that he had noticed my presence. I was trying hard to make sense of what he was saying when he suddenly went quiet. My immediate suspicion was that he

had died or was finalising his preparations to walk through ‘the valley of death’.

To confirm my suspicions, I knelt down and took his wrist in order to feel his pulse. What happened next, no science can ever explain. The comrade, who we regarded as our most serious stretcher case, lifted himself off the stretcher with such force that he jerked me upright. Had I not released his wrist, I would have been dragged along with him as he took bold steps forward. As if in a trance, his gaze was fixed straight ahead as though he was attracted to, or hypnotised by an invisible figure ahead of him. My panicky thoughts ordered my eyes to seek courage and encouragement from the comrades who had followed me to view the sick comrade. The stretcher bearers had disappeared, the medic who had brought me here was nowhere to be seen, my batman, Donaldson, had melted away, and the three other comrades who had accompanied me were out of sight.

The only comrade I could see around me was the sick comrade, or was it his apparition? The thought was frightening and I wanted to run away, away from him. Just then, about fifteen paces ahead of me, the figure collapsed. Instead of running away from it, I ran towards it. When I reached the comrade, froth had formed in his mouth and he was dead.

Conscience forbade me from leaving the comrade where he had died. I resolved we would carry him up to Chindunduma and have him accorded a decent burial. Persuading those who had carried the comrade when he was ill, and all those who had been witnesses to the strange manner of his death, to carry his dead body was an impossible task. Even enlisting those not in this category was difficult because word had spread like wild fire to the rest of the detachment about the strange occurrence of the evening.

As we set off on the last leg of our journey to Chindunduma, the mood within the detachment was gloomy, largely due to the natural sadness a dead body attracts. The gloom was further accentuated by the sound of a short burst of automatic gunfire, though at a safe distance from our position – a sure reminder that life, for all of us, was an expendable resource. The sound was not that of the rifles that we used, but of the FN rifles used by the enemy. Coming from the general direction where the enemy had deployed his paratroopers yesterday, this seemed to be confirmation that the enemy had not withdrawn.

Around 12.30 am we got to Chindunduma. Fearing that the base could have been taken over by the enemy, we approached very cautiously. We

were pleased to find that a near normal situation obtained. At this late hour the children were still in the middle of having dinner. Even though the base had not been attacked, all the children were being evacuated during the day to secret locations, from the day our Headquarters was attacked. They would come back to their base after 7 pm, hence the reason why their evening meal was being served late. I noticed also that there were a large number of adult comrades in the base, whom I later learned were those who had escaped the enemy bombardments of our bases and had made it safely to Chindunduma. From these, I organised a small burial party for our dead comrade.

I arranged for the twenty comrades who would accompany me back to our base to be given food ahead of everyone else. After eating they were to take a short early rest in readiness for the return to our Headquarters at 4 am. A room was allocated where they would all sleep together so that I would have no problem locating them when the time came for us to go. Only after I had finalised all the arrangements did I realise how hungry I was. Except for an early breakfast, I had not eaten anything the whole day. While food was being prepared for me, I took a quick but refreshing bath.

I was preparing to take a short rest when I saw the platoon commander I had assigned to bring the sick to Chindunduma yesterday. He was visibly embarrassed to see me. I decided to add to his embarrassment.

“So you decided to enrol as a pupil, rather than return to confront the enemy?” I chastised Comrade Batanai Vatema. The beaming smile he had worn just before he saw me was frozen on his face. Anyone unaware of what conversation was taking place would wonder whether he was grinning or preparing to cry.

“You should not be worried,” I continued to rub salt into his wounded pride, “the revolution takes care of both adults and kids. You are free to choose which one you want to be. Of course, I can see you chose to be a kid, so welcome to Chindunduma Infants School.”

“No Comrade Dragon,” he finally broke his silence, “it was not my wish that I should not return as per your instruction, but when the time came for the platoon to return, I could not locate my troops.”

“What a pity,” I feigned sympathy, “so you were a commander without troops? Since your wish was to return, you now have the opportunity to fulfil it because in a few hours time I will be going back and you can join me.”

At 3.45 am I left the bed on which I had been reclining for the past one and a half hours, but had completely failed to find sleep. I quickly brushed my teeth, washed my face and put on my camouflage uniform. It was exactly 4 am when I opened the door leading into the room where twenty members of my detachment had been allocated to sleep. I switched on the lights and noticed that there were only seven comrades sleeping in the room. I thought I had come to the wrong room and began to leave.

“Comrade Dragon, is it already time for us to leave?” my batman inquired, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“Yes, it is already 4 am, where are the rest?”

“We all slept together in this room, maybe they are up, preparing themselves for the journey back,” my batman replied. That made sense, for all the section commanders were not in the room. I went out of the room and listened hard for any telltale noise of where they could be. Apart from the low voices of the seven comrades in the room who were readying themselves, the only other sounds were the whistling of the wind and the swishing of the leaves.

By 4.30 am I was convinced that my flock had flown. To attempt to reinforce my detachment at this hour would be a futile and time-wasting endeavour. I was determined to rejoin my force at Chimoio before or just after sunrise, so I decided to start with my remaining seven comrades. No, not seven but eight, because as we were about to begin our journey, Comrade Batanai Vatema joined us. It was now my turn to feel embarrassed. I had not believed him when he said he could not locate his troops. Now, in his very presence, thirteen of my comrades were nowhere to be found. Comrade Batanai Vatema had been vindicated.

Attack – Day 3

Our way back was a lot faster; our numbers were small and easier to control, we had no sick comrades to care for, just our personal weapons and ammunition. The route was the same one we had used going to Chindunduma and everyone was now familiar with it. At 6.30 am the sun was beginning to rise and we were reaching the outskirts of Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters. In another twenty to thirty minutes we should be at the National Stores and reunited with my troops.

We were fifteen minutes away from our destination when the enemy bombardment resumed. Today, like yesterday, there was expectation and

preparedness to receive the unwelcome visitors.

Overnight the commanders had taken stock of their force levels. Some bases, such as Nehanda (women's base), Kaguvi* (base for the elderly), Parirenyatwa (medical base), Chitepo College (political orientation base) and the transport base were, except for the dead and critically injured, completely deserted. Maybe most of the adult comrades I had seen at Chindunduma, or who constituted part of my fighting force at the National Stores Base, originated from these bases.

Other bases such as the HQ itself (command base), Takawira Base 1 and 2 (training bases), National Stores (food and clothing provisions base) where I had formed an operational headquarters for my newly formed and expanding force, and the National Armoury (base for arms and munitions), whose exact location and force strength was a mystery to the vast majority of the comrades, still had a significant number of troops.

The enemy's intelligence about our bases was built from information from captured comrades, surreptitious deployment of agents amongst us, and observation and listening posts. The best protection for the National Armoury was its secretiveness. Except for a tiny handful of senior commanders (no one seemed to know which commanders), no one knew where or whether the National Armoury did exist within the area of the ZANLA Headquarters, or maybe the arms and munitions were being secretly brought from some remote location. Because this information was a closely guarded secret, the enemy could not, with all the means and resources at his disposal, build an intelligence picture of where the National Armoury was located.

Sometime during yesterday's attacks, the enemy had conducted random prodding bombardments (reconnaissance by fire) in areas he suspected the National Armoury to be located, to provoke reaction from troops guarding this most prized objective. If the bombs had come close to hitting the intended target, so far it was not evident because the lack of response from the suspected positions maintained the secrecy and thereby perpetuated the mystery. I was convinced that if the National Armoury did exist in the general area I thought it did, the enemy had not found its location. Had the enemy made the discovery, he would not waste time before destroying and exploding the arsenal. The enemy did not use the Russian or Chinese made rifles, except for a few that were given to the Selous Scouts who posed as

comrades. There would be no sense in him preserving any huge stockpiles of our weaponry if they were discovered.

The first waves of bombardment this morning seemed to concentrate in the perceived general area of the National Armoury, and the Headquarters. The thirst the enemy had yesterday to attack the National Stores and the two training bases was quenched by the spirited resistance encountered from our forces.

I was in the process of analysing the pattern of attacks by the enemy today when we reached the National Stores and I re-joined my troops. They were in a heightened state of alert and ready to take on the enemy, should he decide to bomb our base. So far he hadn't. Comrade Captain Devil quickly briefed me about what had transpired during the evening while I had been away. He had restructured his platoons and sections and addressed all the forces under command to reinforce my message that if the enemy continued his attack we would vigorously and resolutely engage and defeat him. The only unfortunate occurrence of the evening was that shortly after I led the platoon to go to Chindunduma, three comrades had absconded from their positions to go to Chimoio, it was believed. It dawned on me then that the enemy fire I had heard in the evening must have been targeting these three cowards.

Early this morning before the bombardment resumed, Captain Devil had replaced the section that was deployed overnight to intercept comrades trying to escape to Chimoio town or Gondola, and re-directing them to the National Stores. The section brought along with it twenty-five other comrades who had been rounded up during the evening. Except for two comrades who had non-lethal shrapnel wounds, all the other new arrivals were in good health.

I left the welcoming, politicisation and deployment of the new 'recruits' in the hands of their battalion commander whose transformation, within a space of just two days, had exceeded my expectations. Had he remained in the battlefield for years, I doubt that he would have been able to reach the level of confidence and bravery that he had acquired in just over forty-eight hours. The verbal therapy (or is it lashing) I had administered, followed by the immediate assignment of greater responsibilities, were instrumental in this metamorphosis.

With the assumption of greater command responsibilities over the control and deployment of our burgeoning force, Captain Devil had given me the

time and space to concentrate on a deeper analysis of the overall defence strategy for the ZANLA Headquarters, as opposed to the narrow tactical deployment of the limited forces under direct command. The strategy I was formulating in my mind involved firstly, the need to assess our force strength in all the bases, and secondly, the need to coordinate their defensive and offensive strategies against the enemy.

I was satisfied with my plan. I called Captain Devil and instructed him to send two of his men to each of our bases, except Takawira Base 2. These emissaries were to carry a sealed message to the commanders of the respective bases they went to. They were to hand the sealed messages directly to the base commanders, and wait to receive and bring back sealed responses. I then instructed Captain Devil to give me two comrades to accompany me to Takawira Base 2.

By 1.15 pm I was entering Takawira Base 2, accompanied by my two comrades. There was the remote possibility that the enemy could have overrun the base, but judging by the amount of resistance the previous day, there was a higher probability that the comrades were still in control of the base. Since this morning, the concentration of enemy bombardment had been elsewhere and not against Takawira Base 2 or the National Stores Base, where I had set my operational headquarters. Considering the latter assumption to be the most probable, I decided to enter the base following an open track where we were easily recognisable by the occupants of the base and its perimeter guards. I ordered that we sling our guns behind our backs to show our non-aggressive intentions. To enter the base using the cover of the vegetation could be misinterpreted as an enemy trying to secretly infiltrate.

A shot whistled above our heads. Instinctively we hit the ground and got ready to return the fire. I ordered my comrades not to fire back until I had ascertained whether it was friendly or enemy fire. I was beginning to believe that I had erred in my judgement about the situation in the base when, to my relief, the familiar challenge to identify ourselves boomed out.

“I am Comrade Dragon Patiripakashata and I’m accompanied by two other comrades,” I quickly responded. After a few verbal exchanges the perimeter guards were reassured about our identity and we were allowed to proceed into the base.

I was familiar with the camp and needed no one to direct me to the command post. From a distance of about forty metres I could see that

yesterday's bombardments had failed to destroy the command structures. I was looking around, trying to assess the extent of the damage to the camp, when a familiar voice halted me in my tracks.

"Comrade Dragon, thank God you are alive," it was the unmistakable voice of my friend, Comrade Edward Pedzisai, the one to whom I had loaned my rifle three days ago. I looked around but he was nowhere to be seen. I was confused. The voice had sounded very close and yet I could not see him. If it had been in the evening I would have blamed the darkness for shielding him. I was about to call his name when just two metres away from me dry grass began to move, revealing beneath it an entrance to some underground structure. Out of the hole emerged Pedzisai.

At his bidding, I followed Pedzisai into the hole, leaving the two comrades who had accompanied me outside. The next few moments I went through the experiences of a deep-sea diver. As the diver leaves the surface of the sea and is swallowed by its fathomless waters, he soon discovers that there is yet another world beneath – a world with its own vegetation, intriguing creatures and sunken treasures.

It was hard to believe what I was seeing, and yet it was very real. Beneath the seemingly dark hole was an amazingly intricate network of well-lighted rooms and passages I had never known existed beneath Takawira Base 2. A wooden sign hung on the passage wall read, 'Welcome to Takawira Base 3.' This was no understatement at all. I was led past a room with a written sign, 'Briefing Room', and another one saying 'Guard Room', before we came to the one that said 'COMD', short for commander. Outside the door made of grass leading into the commander's room, Comrade Edward shouted a password. A comrade from inside responded by challenging the password, to which Edward shouted back an authentication password before the door was opened and we were allowed to enter.

Inside the room Comrade Takawira, whose name was the same as the base he commanded, was seated on his bed made of wooden sticks and dried grass. His bed was separated from the one on the opposite side of the room, and used by his two batmen, by a rectangular table with four chairs, one on each side of the table, made of the same materials as the bed. Both the beds and the chairs were fixed to the ground. The two batmen used the same bed since at any given time when one was asleep the other had to be awake. The two batmen were in the room with their commander, and it was

one of them who challenged Comrade Edward's password and let us into the room.

I knew Comrade Takawira very well. We were both trained at Tembwe in Tete province at the same time. Both of us were also promoted into the officers' corps as Members of General Staff at the same time. When a few weeks back I was appointed to be the acting Director for Politics, my rank was elevated to just above that of an ordinary Member of General Staff and just below that of a Member of the High Command. Therefore, I was now more senior to Comrade Takawira. When I entered his room, he stood to attention and saluted me. Comrade Takawira was overjoyed to see me and to know that so far I had survived the enemy's aggression.

"I never knew you had such an elaborate defence strategy for the base," I remarked, referring to the underground complexes and passages, part of which I had just seen.

"True," responded Comrade Takawira, "both the design and construction of this defence system was completed long before I took command of the base." Comrade Takawira then went on to reveal the secret of the base commanders.

"When this piece of land, now Takawira Base 2, was still virgin forest, about three hundred comrades who had completed their training in guerrilla tactics in Tanzania arrived in a ship at the Port of Beira, and were driven in lorries to an undisclosed location during one dark evening. They were to remain at this location for the next four months, isolated from the rest of the world," Comrade Takawira began explaining.

"During this period, they dug trenches and created an intricate network of complexes and passages within a perimeter of about one and a half kilometres. Using logs, grass and soil, they provided a roof for the structures beneath and made provision for firing positions and emergency exits. When the work was completed, the outside was skilfully camouflaged. When the job was done, all those who had participated in it were whisked away in the dead of night to a forward base to await operational deployment inside Rhodesia. None of them, despite having lived in the base for over four months, could tell its exact location.

"The base remained unoccupied for the next six months, during which time the outside of the underground bunkers had blended well with the local terrain. When the first group of recruits came for training, none knew of the existence of the underground defensive structures. Not even their trainers!

The only person to whom the secret was revealed was the base commander. He himself was sworn to never divulge the secret to anyone else, during or after his command of the base, except to the one who succeeded him as base commander. The existence of the underground structures thus became the secret of the base commanders," Comrade Takawira concluded.

The secret was now out and the bunkers were serving the purpose for which they were constructed. For the next thirty to forty minutes we reviewed the developments of the last thirty six-hours. Even though we had been caught napping by the enemy's surprise attack on our bases, many of these bases had quickly overcome the initial shock and had fought back, but a few others had either disintegrated or been wiped out. I informed Comrade Takawira of my thinking on how best to defend our bases and end the enemy aggression. I further told him that I had taken the initiative to invite all the base commanders to rendezvous this evening at 7 pm at his base so that we could coordinate our strategy. In anticipation of his agreeing to my proposals I had, in my letters of invitation, spelled out the passwords that would be used for authentication when arriving at Takawira Base 2. I wanted these passwords to be adopted this evening and the perimeter guards to be told to expect the arrival of the base commanders.

It was 3.40 pm when I returned to the National Stores base in the company of my two comrades, satisfied with the outcome of my visit to Takawira Base 2. On hearing of my arrival, Captain Devil came to welcome me back and to brief me on occurrences during my absence.

While we were away, two enemy planes, a minute from each other, came on a bombing mission of the National Stores warehouse. As the lead plane was approaching its target it was greeted by a heavy volley of fire from the comrades, causing the pilot to miss his target. As the plane banked to go back to base, it was trailed by a line of black smoke, confirmation that it had been hit. The second pilot witnessed the fate of the first plane and decided the target was too far and the mission too risky. As his plane was just coming within range of the ground forces and about a hundred metres away from the target, the pilot banked right and retreated.

All but one of the emissaries I had sent with letters for the base commanders had returned. At Kaguvi, Nehanda and Parirenyatwa, except for the dead and mortally injured, these bases were deserted and the emissaries brought back the messages they had been given to deliver. The two emissaries to the Headquarters Base were fired at as they were entering

the base. It was not possible to determine whether they were fired at by enemy forces or by our own comrades.

One of the comrades was hit and remained at the spot where he fell, and the other managed to run away back to our base. This comrade could not say whether his colleague had been killed or just injured. Fortunately however, the one who got away was the one who was carrying the letter, and he brought it back with him. If the letter had been with the other comrade there was a possibility that it could have fallen into the hands of the enemy, ruining my arrangements for the evening and necessitating a quick change of plans.

By the time debriefing ended my spirits had already been dampened. My expectations of a grand indaba involving base commanders amounted to almost nothing. Most of our bases had been reduced to zero operational efficiency and the only positive confirmation to my invitation came from the commander of Takawira Base 1.

During the day the enemy had continued pounding selected targets throughout all our bases, but the intensity of the attacks had tapered off in comparison to yesterday. From morning till now there had been three sorties targeting the warehouse. Of these, only one had been on target. It was now 5 pm and in another two hours it would be dark. It seemed most unlikely that our base would be subjected to further bombardment for the remainder of the day. Credit must be given to my forces for their strong resistance each time the enemy attacked our base. They had earned my respect and, it seemed, that of the enemy – respect can be another form of fear.

At about 5.20 pm, I instructed Captain Devil to have a section ready to accompany me to Takawira Base 2. According to my plan the base commanders were to rendezvous there at 7 pm. I calculated that if we left our Op. HQ at 6 pm it would take us about forty-five minutes to reach Takawira Base 2.

The enemy had plans of his own. At 5.30 pm there was a roar like thunder in the sky that took every one of us completely by surprise. The enemy unleashed ferocious and simultaneous attacks on all our bases as wave after wave of planes bombarded our positions. Convinced the incessant bombardment had neutralised our resistance, the enemy brought in low flying helicopters with their mounted guns blazing at our positions. But my forces fought back doggedly against this formidable foe. I moved

from position to position amongst my troops, motivating them to fight hard. So far we had suffered three fatalities and about a dozen injuries, none of them life threatening.

As suddenly as they had arrived, the planes withdrew from the battle area at 6.30 pm. A few bullets from the ground followed them as if to ensure they were driven out of our airspace. Moments later there was absolute silence in all our bases. At least for today, there would be no further enemy bombardments.

We finished counting our costs around 8 pm and immediately after I set out for Takawira Base 2, accompanied by my section. We arrived there about two hours late, just before 9 pm. As I suspected, no other base commander, including the one from Takawira Base 1 who had confirmed he was going to come, had arrived. We waited until 10 pm in the faint hope there would be a late arrival, but no one came. Together with the commander of Takawira Base 2 we then mapped out a common strategy of defence. I explained my theory that the enemy wanted to find and destroy our National Armoury. This should not be allowed to happen at any cost. Our overall strategy centred on how to position our force, command and control of such a force and its reinforcement, in the event that such a threat became a reality.

Satisfied that we had made contingency plans for every conceivable scenario, I left Takawira Base 2 and rejoined my forces at the National Stores at 1.30 a.m.

Burials – Day 1

Saturday, November 26, I woke up at 5 am after three hours sleep. Sleep deprivation was beginning to take its toll on me, as it did the rest of my embattled comrades. With a bit of effort and a sense of responsibility, I overcame the urge to go on sleeping. It was possible and most likely that in as little as three hours from now the enemy would resume his bombardment of our positions. I needed to make sure the comrades were awake and alert so as to repel the onslaught when it began.

I walked to where I knew Captain Devil would be sleeping. He was snoring heavily in his sleep. Were I an enemy, I would have detected his presence and exact location from twenty metres away. Other comrades who slept close to him were also in deep slumber, apparently unperturbed by the snoring, as if it was a lullaby that soothed them.

I stooped down beside Captain Devil, gently nudged his left shoulder and softly called out, "Captain Devil, wake up." The snoring stopped and a wide grin spread across his face, but he remained asleep. I nudged him again, this time a little harder, "Captain Devil, Captain Devil, please wake up." The grin left his face and, still in his sleep, he mumbled some incomprehensible words. I began losing my patience and this time shoved him hard and raised my voice, "Wake up Captain Devil!"

His senses began journeying back to the world of the living, and his natural instinct was to go for his gun. In war, many survive by reacting to their instincts rather than to logic. Captain Devil was a firm believer in the doctrine of instinctive survival. He thrust out his right hand to retrieve his gun where he had laid it before going to sleep, close to the pillow. Somehow the barrel felt thicker and the gun seemed stuck to the ground. Instinct overruled logic and in his dreamy stupor he jerked free his gun! "What the hell are you doing pulling my ankle like that you...", I screamed at him as I lost my balance and fell over him. Now wide-awake, Captain Devil was very apologetic, "I am very sorry Comrade Dragon; I thought I was pulling at my gun."

I ordered Captain Devil to dress quickly so that we could inspect the readiness of our forces. First, we inspected the perimeter sentry posts. There were fourteen positions, each with two comrades. Except for two positions, all the other guards were asleep on duty. What this meant is that it was theoretically possible for the enemy to occupy our base without firing a shot. For all the talk about vigilance and being alert, the reality on the ground had a sobering effect. I laid the blame for this gross dereliction of duty on the guards on duty and the commanders who were supposed to conduct regular inspections of the guard positions. They too had slept on duty. I dressed down both the commanders and the commanded in proportion to their rank and accountability.

After completing the perimeter inspections we woke up all the comrades in the base and made them ready for what I believed was an imminent continuation of the attack. By 7 am all the comrades under my command were psychologically prepared and motivated to repel any enemy aggression.

Uncharacteristically, by 9 am the enemy had not resumed his bombardment. This I considered to be a ruse to make us relax our vigilance before mounting an attack when we were off guard. Ten o'clock, still no

attack. Could this mean the attacks had ended? Inconceivable! Yesterday afternoon had seen some of the heaviest bombardment by the enemy since the battle for Chimoio began, giving credence to my theory that the enemy would try to parachute ground troops to mop up pockets of resistance as well as seek and destroy our National Armoury, if indeed it existed. The resistance by our comrades had been more ferocious and better coordinated than in the previous days. Radio communications between our fighting units had been established and we had worked out a strategy for reinforcing our weak positions if the need arose. November 25 had proved a turning point in our fortunes. However, I still remained convinced that the real battle for Chimoio would begin when we engaged enemy ground forces. We had made plans for this eventuality and I would command such an operation when it began.

Time now was 10.45 am. There still was no sign of enemy activity in the air or on the ground. It suddenly occurred to me that during the past three days, no one amongst us had listened to the enemy radio station (Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation) to hear how they reported the ongoing operations against our bases. I told Captain Devil to find me a radio. It took him about twenty minutes to bring one to me and when I switched it on it was tuned to a music station. All the comrades within earshot threw puzzled glances in the direction of the sound. Any strange noises had come to be associated with the enemy and in the prevailing circumstances, the noise from the radio was considered strange. It was no wonder the puzzled faces of the comrades reflected a mixture of confusion, trepidation and admonition. None of these expressions affected my resolve to tune in to a news station.

I got it just as the news bulletin was winding up. "To end the news here now are the headlines," the newscaster said. The same ending that I had heard since I was a kid. Can't these people come up with something original? I thought to myself. When you hate a system, you hate everything that makes it tick. That's how I felt as I listened to the monotonous voice of the newscaster. "The Joint Operations Command issued a statement late last night announcing the successful completion of Operation Dingo," continued the newscaster. "The operation targeting Chimoio, Mugabe's terrorist headquarters in Mozambique, dealt a fatal blow to the movement, and killed thousands of terrorists, amongst them some senior commanders...." I was fascinated by the golden quality of the newscaster's voice. Despite the lies

behind the message, the newscaster had a soothing and captivating voice, contrasting with the previous monotone. Just then the significance of what had been said hit me; the battle was over!

I wanted to share immediately the good news with my comrades, starting with those who were closest to me. I looked for the many puzzled faces that a while ago were a mixture of confusion, trepidation and admonition. Only a few remained, but their faces were beaming with joy. I knew the cat was out of the bag and the faces that had vanished had taken the news with them to the rest of the comrades in the base.

I began to weigh the significance of the news. My immediate conclusion was that what I had heard over the radio was pleasing and disappointing at the same time. Pleasing because the death and destruction that was visited upon us during the last three days had finally come to an end. We now had the opportunity to attend to our injured, and the gruesome task of burying our dead. Disappointing because the real battle for Chimoio had ended before it began. The showdown I had hoped for with the Rhodesian infantry had melted away, and with it the immediate opportunity to avenge the deaths of Kelvin, Daniel, and all the comrades who had perished here at Chimoio, at Nyadzonya, at Tembwe, at all the battlefields in Rhodesia and in the countries which provided us with rear bases. The anguish and the persecution of our masses back home had not been atoned for, but were instead multiplied by the deaths here of their children who had selflessly paid the supreme sacrifice for the cause of freedom. Not their individual freedom, but the freedom of all the oppressed masses in Rhodesia, and the birth of a free Zimbabwe.

The communications we had established to coordinate our fighting strategy I now used to announce the cessation of hostilities; and even more importantly, to direct and guide our next phase of operations, caring for the sick and injured and burial of the dead. No one had thought exactly how this task would be performed because no one expected the fighting to end so suddenly or to be alive when it did.

I took charge of the situation and began issuing instructions. My immediate priority was to organise search and burial parties. The search parties were to look for the injured and bring them to a hastily set up medical transit point where first aid would be administered before they could be transferred to proper medical facilities in Chimoio town or Gondola. In the meantime, we dispatched some officers to go to Chimoio to

negotiate with Mozambican authorities for the provision of ambulances and other vehicles to ferry our injured.

I did not understand why the Mozambican forces had failed to come to our aid during the three-day ordeal. A senior officer who commanded the FRELIMO garrison in Chimoio at the time offered the explanation, long after Zimbabwe's independence, that he had been ordered to fire artillery shells into our bases to help in repulsing the enemy, but ignored that order because inadvertently those shells could have caused casualties amongst the comrades. While that explanation sounds plausible, it does not explain why they did not fire at Rhodesian planes overflying their airspace.

I was no stranger to death or dead bodies. I do not mean the casual attendance at a funeral and the subsequent viewing of the deceased from a safe distance, lying in a coffin in eternal sleep, with the physical features rearranged to present as peaceful an appearance as is humanly possible. No! I had on numerous occasions seen the ugly face of death in its raw and unsculptured form.

When I was about 12 years old I had developed a habit of spending some hours with my father, a nurse by profession, when he was on night duty at a district hospital. On one such evening, around 11 pm, I was about to ask my father to walk me to our house situated approximately 300 metres away, when the main entrance door was flung open. A man drenched in blood stumbled into the hospital and advanced towards me and my father. An axe was sunk into his forehead and its blade cut across his face, just missing the left eye, bisecting the nose in two, and ending just above the upper lip. The wooden axe handle, like an abnormally long nose, jutted in front of him and his left arm formed the bridge holding it firmly in position. I doubted that even without the support of the hand, the axe could have fallen off as it seemed firmly anchored in his face. The plausible reason for holding the axe handle was to reduce the pain caused by the downward pull. My father ran to aid his patient but before he could reach him, the man fell and died. I had remained rooted where I had stood with my father. This experience had proved too much for a twelve-year-old. When the patient collapsed and died, I puked and fainted.

As I grew older my experiences and abilities to cope with similar or worse situations also increased. I could look a dead man or woman in the face without showing outward emotions, unless he or she was a close relative or a dear friend. On a number of occasions I assisted my father in

carrying dead patients to the mortuary, un-affected by the stench of death and the cold eeriness of the room, and unaffected too by the lack of life and expression on the faces of its other occupants. In my mind I was able to differentiate the feelings towards a dead stranger and those towards a relative or friend. A stranger's death evoked in me, not pain, but sympathetic feelings of sadness, not for the deceased, but for the pain and anguish the death caused to the living friends and relatives. A dead relative or friend, on the other hand, evoked pain and a deep sense of loss proportionate to the degree of closeness we shared in life.

A few months before I crossed into Mozambique to join the armed liberation struggle, I was witness to a horrific traffic accident. I was driving on Christmas Eve from Fort Victoria to Nuanetsi where I worked as the Executive Secretary for Neshuro Council. After driving for eighty-four kilometres, I decided to take a short rest and drink a Coke at a service centre just off the highway. A lot of people had alighted from a bus and were buying beers and other food items from the service centre. It was obvious to me that most of the passengers were from the city and were going to their rural homes to spend the Christmas holiday with their families.

Zimbabwe is predominantly a Christian nation and Christmas is the most revered holiday on the Christian calendar. The 25th of December is celebrated by family reunions, religious congregations and, most importantly, lots of wining and dining which usually stretches into the New Year, 1 January.

Around 11 am I watched the passengers in their merriment and it was obvious the carnival atmosphere of the occasion had begun. The driver, a quart of beer in each hand, was the first to re-board the bus. He sat behind the steering wheel and placed his beers underneath his seat so that they could not be easily detected if the traffic police stopped the bus – a familiar routine it seemed. He started and revved the engine, and hooted intermittently to alert his passengers that it was now time to go. On the highway another bus went past, driving in the same direction. The driver realized that unless he took off now and overtook the other bus he would have no additional passengers for the remainder of the journey. Thus the driver started moving the bus slowly and in jerks, again a familiar signal to his passengers that anyone who did not board the bus now risked being left behind.

Most of the passengers with beers and items of grocery for their families at home jostled and had a tough tussle to get into the bus first. A few others were shouting to the cashiers to give them their change and did not heed the familiar signals from the driver. With most of the passengers now in the bus, the conductor banged three or four times on the side of the bus to signal to the driver that every passenger had boarded. As the bus picked up pace, the conductor, one hand holding two beer pints and the other the bus railing at the door, hoisted himself into the bus and closed the door, ignoring the screams of three passengers who had been left behind and were making a fruitless chase to catch the bus or attract the attention of the driver in order to stop. Little did they realize then that in their misfortune lay their luck.

When they were resigned to their fate, I came to their aid. I told them to jump into the back of my Mazda pickup and I would help them catch up with their bus. I had underestimated the speed of the bus. Travelling between 120 and 140 kilometres per hour, it took me almost twenty minutes to catch up with the bus. Driving behind it I kept flicking my lights on and off to attract the attention of the driver to stop, but to no avail. Through the rear window of the bus I could see the passengers singing, dancing and drinking beer, and I was convinced some were urging the driver to go faster. The driver rose to the occasion, much to the delight of his passengers. On two or three occasions I tried to overtake the bus but decided it was dangerous to do so as it kept straddling the middle of the road. I decided to wait until it stopped to pick up or drop off some passengers.

The bus was approaching a sharp bend but still maintaining its high speed. I was trailing it at a safe distance of about forty to fifty metres. From the other direction, a lorry loaded with bags of corn and with about ten passengers sitting on top of them was approaching. The bus driver seemed not to be aware of the danger until it was too late. He panicked and tried to avoid collision with the lorry. The bus swerved to the right of the road, then to the left and was going again to the right when the collision occurred. The transition from joyous singing to panicky screams amongst the passengers lasted a fraction of a minute, and then there was the silence of the dead and the groans of pain of the injured. The only unaffected people at the scene were the three passengers and I – and the passengers kept repeating their gratitude to their ancestors for taking them out of the ill-fated bus.

The gruesome carnage spread before me was almost indescribable. You needed to have witnessed the accident to be convinced that the rusted and mangled remains we were looking at were the aftermath of the collision between the bus and lorry. Now they lay twenty metres apart, neither able now to challenge the other. Any humans still trapped in their bellies had their lives extinguished. If there was any hope of finding survivors it was among those the two metal monsters had coughed out in the process of collision.

Bodies and body parts were strewn all over a wide area. Our immediate priority was to render first aid to the injured. It seemed the number of those killed surpassed those who survived, many of whom were barely hanging on to life. Amongst the injured, many had deep grisly cuts on different parts of their bodies – broken bones and detached limbs, dislocations, gushes, bruises and swellings. Some moaned with pain and others had sunk into unconsciousness. Thirty minutes from the time the accident occurred, the number of rescuers and search parties had significantly multiplied as other passing motorists and locals arrived to help. Someone must have had the wisdom to contact the Police, Ambulance Service and the Fire Brigade, something I had overlooked in my haste to save what lives I could.

The Fire Brigade was cutting into the mangled remains of the bus and lorry in search of any signs of life, and later to recover bodies. The Ambulance Service was expertly and efficiently attending to the injured and covering and protecting the dead bodies. The Police wasted no time in recording statements of eyewitnesses. It was not until 5 pm that I was able to leave the scene of the accident. I carried with me deep feelings of sadness for the senseless loss of so many lives through an accident that could have been avoided. According to the Police, as many as 39 people perished at the scene of the accident.

Memories of these past experiences flashed back as I now began the unenviable task of attending to the injured and the burying of my dead comrades. Pain and deep sorrow combined and created a new dimension to my philosophy of pain for the relatives and close friends, and sorrow for strangers. The revolutionary struggle had bonded us into a relationship much stronger than that of relatives or close friends, a relationship in which none was a stranger to another. In their relief that the battle for Chimoio had ended, the surviving comrades nonetheless felt excruciating pain over the

loss of ‘blood brothers and sisters’ who sacrificed their lives for the cause of freedom.

To this day, I cannot comprehend fully or describe succinctly the metaphysical transformation that took place inside me as I viewed the horrific images of my dead and injured comrades. I knew my dear departed comrades could no longer feel pain. The enemy fire had succeeded in extinguishing the flame of life that for years had lit the now inert bodies and, in the process and unintentionally, extinguished the pain and suffering that years of colonial subjugation had visited upon them. What the enemy could not succeed in doing was to destroy the revolutionary spirit that these bodies had been home to.

As I psychologically braced myself for the task of laying the dead to rest, my mind began to see not dead bodies, but the most beautiful and high quality seeds about to be sown in the ground so they could regenerate and multiply. I saw not death, but a new beginning. I felt no fear or hopelessness, but a stronger sense of hope and fulfilment. I closed my mind’s eye to the pain and anguish that surrounded me. The pain and anguish of the living, for the dead had been spared such pain by the enemy’s bullet. Like the lifeless bodies of my comrades spread before my eyes, I too refused to embrace the fear and suffering that surrounded me. I saw only the courage of my fallen heroes and the purity of their convictions.

The comrades who for three and a half days had their operational command post located at the National Stores and were under my direct command were now to have their role transformed, becoming the nucleus of our next phase of operations – the search and recovery of our injured and dead. Even as it became clear that the battle had ended, many of the surviving comrades continued to flee to the relative safety of Chindunduma, convinced that the pause in the fight was a deceptive lull before hostilities would resume.

I assumed overall charge of the search and recovery phase and ordered Captain Devil to assemble all the troops. By the time they were all assembled I had worked out how I wanted this phase of operations to proceed. In my address to the assembled comrades, I briefly thanked them for their valour in confronting the enemy. While I believed that the enemy had suffered losses and was not likely to resume the fight, we still had to

maintain vigilance and be prepared to engage the enemy should he decide to resume his aggression.

The essential element of my strategy involved safeguarding the National Stores to deny the enemy any possibility of destroying or poisoning our food supplies, or inserting doctored supplies amongst our stocks. This task I assigned to a thirty-man platoon under the command of Captain Devil. Secondly, I wanted the bulk of my force to concentrate on search and recovery efforts. All injured comrades were to be quickly evacuated to a transit medical point to be immediately established. The prioritisation of treatment, or further evacuation to centres with more advanced facilities, would be determined at this transit point.

Concurrently, the burials of the dead were to be conducted expeditiously as the hot and humid conditions would cause their bodies to decompose quickly. The comrades given this second assignment were broken into sections and each section given a specific area of responsibility for its search and recovery mission. The searches were to be conducted methodically to ensure that no injured comrade was left behind and all the dead were located and buried. Except for Takawira Base 2, which I was positive had survived the enemy's onslaught largely unscathed; I wanted every one of our bases to be reached by at least a section or two during the first day of our search and recovery efforts. That turned out to be wishful thinking.

All the search parties were under strict instructions not to eat any food except that provided from the National Stores. Before leaving for their separate but similar missions, the sections were to take food rations with them, and when they returned towards dusk, they would have their evening meals. Additional to their personal weapons, each section had two picks, two shovels and two stretchers constructed using bed sheets or blankets and wooden poles.

I appointed Comrade Mao to be in overall charge of the search and recovery operations. During the time I was a military instructor at Takawira Base 2, Mao was my assistant instructor. Early in the morning when it became clear that hostilities had ended, I had requested the commander at Takawira Base 2 to assign five competent commanders to come under my command, and Comrade Mao was one of them. The other four oversaw the operations of sections assigned to them and were answerable to Comrade

Mao. Any significant discoveries were to be reported to Comrade Mao, who in turn would use his discretion about when to bring them to my attention.

Four days ago, before the enemy attacked our headquarters Chimoio was a hive of activity. Each one of its constituent bases had at least four vehicles. We even had four buses providing shuttle services between bases. While some of our vehicles were donated to our organisation, the majority of them, including all the buses, were commandeered from operational areas in Rhodesia. Out of the 14 satellite bases the most popular destination for the buses was Mbuya Nehanda Base – a females-only base. Saturdays and Sundays were generally considered resting days and no training or serious programmes were organised during weekends. Weekends thus provided the opportunity for comrades to pay visits to friends in other bases. Our bases, together, provided a modicum of city life.

Most of our transport had been destroyed during the last three days. I was relieved to learn that a Land Rover and a three-tonne truck, both in good working condition, had survived at Takawira Base 2. I negotiated for the truck to be based at the National Stores, mainly for casualty evacuation.

Right now, I wished I was at the HQ. My motivation for this was not only the simple fact that it was the nerve centre of our operations, but also a desire to dispel once and for all the nagging feeling, or rather the persistent fear, that Comrade Tongogara might have been at that location when the enemy bombardments began just over three days ago.

Accompanied by a section of nine men, I set out for the HQ. We followed the wide dirt road that linked the National Stores to the HQ and beyond. Having covered about half a kilometre, we passed one of the sections I had set up for the search and recovery effort. Four of its members were swinging their pickaxes furiously into the stubborn ground beneath, while the rest were awaiting their turn to relieve them should they run out of steam. The summer rains that normally started falling in mid-October had delayed, and the intense summer heat had scorched and cracked the ground beneath turning it into an almost impenetrable shield. Only the desire to provide their dead comrades with a decent burial kept the section's spirits high against the seemingly unyielding adversary. Under these circumstances, the section settled for one-metre deep graves instead of the standard two metres.

Along the three-kilometre stretch separating the National Stores from the HQ, we saw about a dozen dead bodies lying in the middle of the road.

Sooner or later the advancing search and recovery sections would reach them and accord them as dignified a burial as was feasible under the circumstances.

It was about 2 pm when we entered the HQ. The comrades who had constituted the perimeter guard for the HQ had reconstituted themselves into search parties for the injured and dead. This base had been my home for the past eight months. Early in the morning, three and a half days ago, I had left this base for the National Stores with Kelvin by my side. Thoughts about Kelvin connected me to the dream. The dream connected me to that fateful day when the attack began. That in turn brought recollections of my seeing Comrade Tongogara's car as I left for the National Stores. So many recollections came rushing back into my mind with such rapidity that I became confused as to what was real and what was imagination. Was it real that Comrade Tongogara's car was in the base on the day of the attack? If it was, did he come in his car or had he just sent his driver with it? There were so many questions for which I had no answers.

Suddenly it dawned on me that those comrades standing in a circle about eighty metres from where we were might hold the answers to my questions. I knew them all by their names. On numerous occasions I assigned them guard duties, gave them political lessons, and many other tasks. Danger Chimurenga was their commander. As we drew closer, I noticed that comrades Hondo and Bazooka were putting the final touches to a mound of earth. The rest of the comrades stood in solemn silence around the mound, and although I could not hear what he was saying, Comrade Danger Chimurenga seemed to be speaking not to the men under his command but to the mound. Dear Lord, they had just finished burying a comrade, maybe Comrade Tongogara! My pace quickened and the comrades who accompanied me had difficulty keeping up. Their task accomplished, the comrades were beginning to drift from the grave when Comrade Danger Chimurenga saw me coming.

"Comrades, Attention! Stand at ease! Attention! Welcome Comrade Dragon," saluted Comrade Danger Chimurenga.

"Stand at ease!" I responded.

There was obvious relief on the faces of the comrades that I was still alive. After the three-day onslaught by the Rhodesian rebel forces you could not be sure who had survived until you actually saw someone moving. I too was relieved to see the familiar faces of the comrades, who

during the last eight months I had been with at the HQ when they carried out guard duties and made me and other comrades sleep well in the full confidence that we were protected.

I wasted no time in getting to the point. “Danger, was Comrade Tongogara here when the attack began three days ago?”

“Yes Comrade Dragon, he was here.” My heart sank. I feared asking the next question lest it should confirm my worst fears.

“Where is he now?” My heart was pounding with fright.

“We carried him to Chimoio town.”

Tongogara was a strong-willed man. No illness could make him lie down. Even when he was involved in a serious car accident in which a senior member of ZANLA was killed, the serious injuries he sustained could not keep him in bed. He was courageous, strong-willed and of indomitable spirit. If he was carried to Chimoio town, it meant he was not able to walk on his own. If he was not able to walk on his own, that might imply that he had very severe injuries, maybe he had lost his legs.

“Couldn’t he walk on his own?”

“No he could not.” Comrade Danger’s answers were short and to the point.

About three months ago I severely cautioned Comrade Danger to answer exactly what he was asked. He was unnecessarily superfluous in his answers. If you asked him “What is the name of your father?” he would answer, “My father is Alexander and my mother Christina.” If you enquired, “Has the doctor arrived?” he would respond, “No he has not. Last year when we called him to come, he came late too.”

From the way he was responding to my questions now, it was clear he had taken my criticism seriously. Except, of course, today I wanted Comrade Danger to anticipate my questions and answer them even before I asked. His short and precise answers had become an irritant. I wanted to know if Comrade Tongogara was still alive, if so, the extent of his injuries, etc. etc.

“Listen you son of a ...,” I swallowed the last word. In strict observance of our guerrilla teachings, it was as much a cardinal sin to swear at a comrade as it was to point a gun at someone, even a wooden imitation, unless you were aiming or firing at an enemy. “I want you to explain everything the way it happened. No additions, no subtractions, no rearrangement of the events. Every detail in the sequence as it occurred.”

It was as if explaining events in a chronological and detailed manner would change the already achieved outcome and make it more palatable. What an illogical reasoning! God damn it, no recourse to logic was ever desired where Comrade Tongogara was concerned. ‘Calm down, calm down, give Danger Chimurenga a chance to tell what happened,’ an inner voice deep inside me seemed to say. I calmed down.

“Okay now, Comrade Danger let’s hear what you have to say,” I prompted him.

“The night before the attack began, I was in Chimoio town,” began Comrade Danger.

“I don’t care where you were,” I interrupted him, “just tell me what happened to Comrade Tongo, not you.” The comrades were taken aback by my outburst. It was very uncharacteristic of the Comrade Dragon they had known and lived with for some time.

“I had been trying for hours to hitch a ride to the HQ but without success,” Danger Chimurenga ignored my outburst and continued with his narration of events. “Just as I was about to give up and call it a day, Comrade Tongogara’s car pulled in to refuel at our refuelling base in Chimoio town.” At the mention of Comrade Tongo’s name, my interest in what Comrade Danger was saying was re-ignited. “That was around 2 am,” Danger said thoughtfully.

“Was Comrade Tongogara in his car?”

Again Danger resisted being stamped. “The lighting conditions were poor and I could not tell whether there were any passengers in Comrade Tongo’s car. As the driver was refuelling the car, I went around to the other side to see if there was anyone on the passenger seat. I pressed my face to the window and peered into the car.” Comrade Danger Chimurenga broke off as an uncontrollable cough took hold of him. I did not know whether to punch or sympathise with him. Was the cough genuine or dramatised for effect?

When finally the cough was controlled, Comrade Danger continued, “Comrade Tongo was staring straight at me. I lost my composure, jumped back two or three steps and saluted him.”

Anyone who knew Comrade Tongogara in the latter days of his life will testify that his most distinguishing characteristics were his eyes and his teeth. Comrade Tongo had a piercing and multi-focal gaze. When he was addressing rallies, comrades seated far apart from each other would feel that

piercing gaze, with each and everyone vowing that he or she was Comrade Tongo's target at that same time. His teeth had a peculiarity of their own. Whether he was speaking, eating, sleeping or doing nothing, his upper and lower teeth would grind against each other, producing a distinctive sound. Another equally important characteristic of Comrade Tongo was that he was an engaging personality. He knew the appropriate things to say and when to say them for any type of audience.

"You thought since the driver is refuelling from that side, you would sneak to this side and steal the car while he was distracted?" Comrade Tongogara quipped. "Unfortunately for you, the driver is clever; he left me behind to guard the car."

"I laughed my lungs out at the humour in his words. Comrade Tongogara had broken the ice and the uneasiness that had gripped me when my eyes met his," Comrade Danger continued. "By the time the driver finished refuelling, I was seated comfortably in Comrade Tongogara's car, laughing at his jokes and waiting for the driver to take us to Comrade Tongogara's next destination – the HQ."

How could fate be so cruel as to bring Comrade Tongo to the HQ on this cursed day? Could it be that the enemy was aware that he would be at the HQ when the attack began? If that was the case, was there an enemy informer among us who communicated his every movement? Could it be his driver? His batman? A member of the Politburo, High Command, General Staff? Or just an inconspicuous individual in our midst? Or was it mere coincidence that he happened to come on a date pre-planned for attack? Maybe there was some truth about Murphy's Law – 'if anything can go wrong, one day it will.' So many thoughts raced through my mind, and none seemed to make any sense.

"It must have been around 4 am when we arrived at the HQ. Except for the guards who stopped us at the checkpoint on the entrance to the HQ, there was no sign of life in the base – no lights, in conformity with our evening procedures, and an eerie quietness since everyone was asleep. On seeing Comrade Tongogara, the guards did not bother to inspect the interior of the vehicle as was expected of them, but instead lifted the wooden boom and let us through. As soon as I alighted, I thanked Comrade Tongogara for transporting me, saluted and wished him a good evening."

Comrade Danger Chimurenga was indeed giving every detail as I had instructed, but to my annoyance. (That's why my batmen had not mentioned

Comrade Tongogara being in the base – they were fast asleep when he arrived.)

“Say ‘Have a good morning’,” Comrade Tongogara had quipped, “It’s almost time to wake up.”

“I wasted no time in going to sleep. I was so tired I wanted to make use of every remaining minute of the evening.”

Danger made a long pause as if talking about sleep had actually sent him to sleep again.

“You may wake up now and continue with your story,” I prompted Comrade Danger, “and you”, I said, turning to the comrades who had been working with Comrade Danger, “this story is of no interest to you. Continue searching for the injured and dead comrades, any delays might cost the lives of more comrades.”

“I overslept and was woken up by the sound of bombs exploding,” Comrade Danger continued. “I grabbed my gun and managed to join the comrades at the nearest guard position. Personally, I did not see Comrade Tongo the whole day, but was getting reports that he was moving from one guard position to another, fighting with and motivating the comrades to engage the enemy,” Comrade Danger went on.

This was consistent with Comrade Tongo’s character – a motivating and resilient personality. Indeed, the combination of natural intelligence and bravery made him a deserving and most suitable choice for the position he held within the guerrilla army – the Chief of Defence of the ZANLA forces.

“The last time Comrade Tongo was reported at a guard position was around 3.30 pm. This coincided with the time the enemy tactics over our base changed and for the first time they started to employ helicopters. Judging from experience, we deduced that the enemy had either deployed ground troops and was giving them cover through the use of helicopters, or that he wanted to test our resistance before he could decide whether to insert ground forces, or worse still, that he had observed a high value target that he wanted to snatch.”

The assumptions stated by Comrade Danger made a lot of sense, especially the last one. Had I not been told at the beginning that Comrade Tongo was carried to Chimoio town, I would have been completely devastated by the thought that Comrade Tongogara was probably in the hands of the enemy.

If due to the intensity of the resistance the enemy had been denied the opportunity to snatch Comrade Tongogara, they probably caused him such injuries that he was not able to walk on his own. This might explain why Comrade Tongogara had to be carried to Chimoio town. All these thoughts flashed through my mind in a fraction of a second.

“I ordered the comrades to intensify their fire against the enemy in order to frustrate any intention they might have to deploy ground forces, or extricate them if they had already been deployed.” Comrade Danger seemed to have been reading my thoughts.

“Until dusk, no further sighting of Comrade Tongogara had been reported. As the enveloping darkness denied the enemy the capability of flying, I immediately ordered all the comrades to search for Comrade Tongogara and any other injured comrades. An agonising thirty minutes passed without him being found. Forty minutes later, still no whereabouts of Comrade Tongogara. Four injured comrades had been located and were being prepared for evacuation. An hour after I ordered the search, I was becoming convinced that Comrade Tongogara had been snatched when one section animatedly announced that they had located him. I enquired if he was alive, and was relieved to hear that he was alive and able to speak.”

I felt the relief which Comrade Danger must have felt when he got the good news.

“I then asked whether he had any injuries,” continued Comrade Danger, “and was told that although he appeared not to have any injuries, he was insisting that he had lost both his legs. It did not make any sense at all to me, and I further enquired whether in their view he had lost his senses. Their response was that he appeared perfectly sane except for the ludicrous claim. I told the comrades to prepare him for evacuation and wait for my arrival at their position. When I got to the position, I spoke to Comrade Tongogara. He had no visible injuries, he felt no pain, but could not feel his legs.”

The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that it was not mere coincidence that the attack took place on the day Comrade Tongogara came to the Headquarters. I wondered also, whether the enemy knew then how close he was to capturing the strategist and the driving engine of our liberation struggle.

Comrade Danger Chimurenga concluded his narration of events by explaining how he had personally accompanied Comrade Tongogara,

carried on a stretcher, to Chimoio town. At Chimoio he was admitted to a military hospital and provided with a twenty-four hour guard. The following evening, after the evening pause in bombardments, Comrade Danger had sent some comrades to Chimoio town to get a progress report on Comrade Tongogara's condition. Comrade Tongogara had regained his sense of feeling and was on the road to full recovery.

Amidst the death, agony and misery that surrounded me, I found some comfort in the knowledge that Comrade Tongogara had survived the enemy's assault largely unscathed. For Comrade Tongo, it would be difficult to overcome the emotional scars arising from the fact that we were not adequately prepared to defend our flagship – ZANLA Headquarters.

I was still trying to get every bit of information about Comrade Tongogara's ordeal when we heard a sound. Believing it could yet again be approaching enemy planes, we adopted a fighting formation. A cloud of dust along the dirt road leading to the HQ soon confirmed the source of the sound. There were three vehicles driving towards the HQ. In the lead was a van and it drove to the damaged building where Comrade Tongogara always parked his car whenever he came to the HQ. The van had tinted windows that made it difficult to see who or what was inside. Before the lead vehicle came to a complete standstill, the heavily armed soldiers in a Toyota pick-up trailing immediately behind the van – about a dozen of them – jumped out of their truck while it was still in motion and quickly deployed around the lead civilian vehicle. Behind the pick-up, another van was also coming to a halt. Evidently, the soldiers were an escort for a senior official or officials in the lead van. For a little while the occupants of both the lead and rear vans remained in their vehicles.

The lessons of Nyadzonya were still fresh and vivid in our minds. Could these be Rhodesians disguised as FRELIMO soldiers? Why were the occupants of the two vans taking their time to alight? This line of thinking was not helpful at all except to induce fear. I refused to be a captive of fear and boldly stepped out of our concealed position, accompanied by only six other comrades, determined to confront the FRELIMO soldiers.

As we drew close to the lead vehicle and before we could accost the soldiers, the rear door of the lead vehicle swung open and out came Comrade Tongogara. Incredulity and disbelief took hold of my emotions. Was this real or was I seeing an apparition? But yes indeed, it was Comrade

Tongo, with all his distinguishing characteristics. Without a second thought I dashed towards him.

“Comrade Tongo, is this really you?” I bubbled with great excitement as I reached Comrade Tongogara, arms outstretched to hug him. Comrade Tongogara reciprocated the gesture and with his usual humour responded, “Sure as the sun rising from the east and setting in the west. Come and hold my hands to confirm it.” (Analogous to the challenge Jesus Christ made to his disciples to prove his identity by inspecting the holes in his hands after he had been nailed to the cross.)

Together with other comrades we congregated around Comrade Tongogara like moths attracted to a light bulb. In the midst of the death, anguish and destruction that surrounded us, knowledge that Comrade Tongogara had survived the attack unleashed upon us by the Smith regime was cause for celebration.

We were in this celebratory mood when a second rear door of the lead van opened and out came an unfamiliar figure. The attention of all the comrades suspiciously shifted from Comrade Tongogara to the stranger. Comrade Tongogara noticed our apprehension and quickly dispelled our fears by introducing the stranger. “Meet the Mozambican Minister of Internal Affairs, Comrade Armando Emilio Guebuza.” This was the first senior official of the Mozambican government to visit Chimoio Headquarters after the attack. We did not know then that this humble looking man before us was destined to become the third President of the Republic of Mozambique (after Presidents Samora Moises Machel and Joaquim Alberto Chissano).

The disembarkation of Comrade Guebuza from the lead van appeared to have been the signal awaited by the occupants of the rear van to alight. Armed with cameras, some began shooting pictures while others armed with pens and paper were scribbling away furiously. Comrade Tongogara became the main focus of attention for both the journalists and our comrades as he narrated the events of the past few days. He had such skill in narrating events that he kept his audience captivated and thirsty to hear more. Even for us who had lived through the experiences of these last few days, hearing them narrated from the mouth of Comrade Tongogara gave them uniqueness and flavour that kept all of us riveted as if to the pages of a very interesting novel.

We had been following Comrade Tongogara wherever his feet chose to take him. He was the pied piper and we were all dancing to his tune. The occasional interruptions to his narration only came from journalists whose instincts for sensationalism sought to redirect or refocus his narration. The first interruption from one of our comrades came as we were passing one of the latrines and a comrade who had gone to urinate in the latrine excitedly drew the attention of Comrade Tongogara to a faint female voice coming from beneath the latrine and calling his name.

All attention shifted to the toilet. Comrade Tongo's natural leadership skills were once again demonstrated as he took charge of the rescue operation.

The toilet was almost three metres deep. The surface was covered with wooden poles, grass filled the gaps created by the crooked poles, and soil was spread over the poles and grass. A hole, slightly bigger than the size of an average adult man's head, was left open and through it human excrement was passed. The toilet had grass walls and no roof. An opening that served as both the entrance and exit to the toilet was designed in such a way that a person outside could not see whoever was inside the toilet, despite the fact that there was no door to close the entrance/exit. From the outside, on the grass wall next to the entrance/exit hung a sign written in bold black letters, 'Men Only.'

Only three people could comfortably enter the toilet at the same time. Four or five people would be squeezed and their combined weight could cause the floor of the toilet to cave in. When we got to the toilet, two comrades were already inside trying to maintain contact with the comrade below. Comrade Tongogara ordered the two comrades to come out so that we could enter.

Accompanied by Comrade Danger Chimurenga, Comrade Tongo and I entered the toilet. Once inside, we tried to make contact with the comrade in the pit. Her voice was hardly audible. Comrade Tongo identified himself and prompted the comrade to identify herself. It was impossible to make sense of what she was saying as her voice was faint. We could not comprehend how she had squeezed through the circular hole, either intentionally or accidentally, to land at the bottom of the toilet pit. What was clear was that the comrade was in a very weak state and needed to be rescued without further delay.

We went out of the toilet and then Comrade Tongo ordered that its grass walls be demolished. That achieved, we carefully removed some of the logs that formed the toilet floor. Utmost care was needed to prevent any poles falling inside and thereby endangering the life of the comrade below. Once a reasonable opening had been created, we threw a rope down and ordered the comrade to hold it tightly so that we could pull her out. Our efforts were wasted. She did not have the strength to hold on to the rope. We decided to lower one of the comrades to go and tie a rope around her waist in such a way that we could pull her out without causing her much pain.

Comrade Tongogara selected one comrade who looked stronger than the rest for the task. In our doctrine, asking a comrade to make a choice was an unnecessary luxury. It was a sign of weakness for a commander to ask for volunteers. An effective commander simply assigned responsibilities to those who in his/her opinion were best suited for the task.

We began to lower the comrade slowly into the latrine pit. Six others were holding one end of the rope and releasing it slowly as the comrade descended. The comrade later recounted his ordeal.

“It was dark and the hot, pungent smell from the bottom of the pit made the descent unenviable. Huge flies buzzed around, disturbed by the invasion of their domain. As my feet came into contact with the soft excrement, I felt a cold wetness, in contrast to the warm air I had felt as I began my descent. I could not restrain a gasp of disgust.”

The comrades on the other end continued to release the rope bit by bit.

“I was knee deep in the stinking mess beneath, but my feet had not touched hard ground. Waist deep, and still I had not reached the bottom. I began to panic. If the comrades above continued releasing the rope, I might end up drowning in the horrible shit. I wanted to shout to them to pull me up. But if I aborted the descent at this stage, I was sure Comrade Tongogara would not be pleased. Thoughts of the female comrade who needed to be rescued gave me courage to persevere. Then another thought entered my mind, ‘suppose there is no comrade beneath and the voice that we had heard was from a ghost.’ I shivered with fear and the wet coldness that surrounded me.”

The comrades above continued releasing the rope.

“Some creepy little creatures were crawling on my body and one of them was moving fast towards my face. In haste and panic I wanted to brush it off. My right arm that was immersed in faeces jerked up and in the process

brought with it its cargo, part of which landed in my open mouth as I prepared to scream, and the other part in my eyes. I missed the creepy creature altogether, the rope slipped from my hands and the fall that had begun was abruptly broken by the hard ground beneath. I stood immersed in the filthy smelly muck up to just below my chest. My eyes had not adjusted to the darkness beneath as my hands searched for the rope.”

Seeing there was now no strain on the rope at the bottom end, the comrades above enquired whether everything was okay.

“The question irritated me. How could I be okay immersed to the chest in this horrible shit? I wanted to challenge the comrades above to come down and find out for themselves, but fear of recriminations from the commander above made me keep my mouth shut. I continued groping in the dark for the elusive rope. ‘Got you,’ I exclaimed as my right hand found it. With my lifeline safely secure in my hand, my focus shifted to trying to locate the comrade I had come down for.

“I changed the rope from my right hand to the left. With my outstretched right hand I prodded into the wet thickness of the excrement, provoking a pungent smell. No body identified. The maggots crawling on the upper part of my body and along my outstretched hand were in their natural habitat. I called into the fading darkness as my eyes began to adjust to the gloom. A female voice responded to the call, but it was so faint that she seemed to be further away from me. I turned in the direction of where the sound seemed to come from and was startled at how close she was. Her whole body up to the shoulders was submerged in the shit that for the last three and a half days had been her prison. She was propped against the wall of the toilet pit and it was difficult to imagine how she had managed to keep herself from drowning. Maybe the lightness of her body against the denseness of the human matter, gave her the buoyancy to remain afloat.

“I quickly tied the rope around her waist and gave it a tug as a signal for the comrades above to start pulling her up. When she was safely out of the toilet pit, the rope was thrown back to me to climb out of the latrine,” the comrade concluded.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the person we had rescued; Comrade Ruvimbo Mujeni, the wife of Comrade Edgar Tekere, the Secretary General of ZANU. Comrade Tongogara immediately ordered some female comrades to assist her to have a bath, change her clothes and have something to eat. Details of her ordeal would be sought later after she

had recovered from the traumatic events of the last few days. As soon as Mrs Tekere had been stabilised and given a thorough cleanup, Comrade Tongogara and his entourage called it a day, took her with them for further medical attention, and drove back to Chimoio town.

Throughout the day the comrades worked hard looking for the injured and burying the dead. So far, about four truckloads of comrades with varying degrees of injury had been taken to Chimoio hospital. Later, when the search parties congregated at the National Stores for a debrief and to receive their evening rations, I would have an idea of how many comrades altogether we had buried today.

Just when I thought it was time to return to the National Stores and call it a day also, Comrade Mao contacted me by radio. As my appointed coordinator for the phase of operations we were now in, I had delegated to him the responsibility for taking operational decisions and he was only to contact me if something big or tragic had happened. Mao's strict adherence to instructions was one of the reasons I had given him the responsibility that he now shouldered.

"What is it that you want, Comrade Mao?" I tried to sound calm but my mind was in turmoil.

"Comrade Dragon, I am at Parirenyatwa Base (hospital base) and I would like you to come here please," Comrade Mao implored.

"Whatever it is you want to show me, can't it wait until tomorrow?" I did not mean what I said. Even as I asked the question, I had already started walking in the direction of Parirenyatwa. My escort section had to trot to catch up with me.

"I think it is extremely important that you come to the base today," Comrade Mao insisted.

It took us just under fifteen minutes to cover the two kilometres separating Parirenyatwa from the HQ. Soon it would be dusk. As we entered the base we saw that all the barrack structures constructed of wood and grass and used as admission wards had been burnt down. The round huts used as living quarters for the hospital staff had also been burnt down. Two mobile operating theatres and three ambulances with their red crosses clearly marked were all burnt.

Comrade Mao and a group of comrades with him did not come to meet us as we entered the base, but remained standing where they were. I took it to mean that they expected us to go to where they stood. All that remained

where there once were barracks and huts were ashes. The fire had burnt itself out, except for two or three positions where logs were still smouldering. The base must have been destroyed on the first day of the attack.

As we approached the position where the comrades stood, the brutal character and callousness of the rebel Rhodesian regime was vividly revealed. I stared in utter disbelief at the evidence of a heinous crime committed against humanity. A crime against people who had been dispossessed from birth, enslaved and humiliated in life, and now savagely and brutally robbed of the gift that only God Almighty can give – the gift of life. Cursed from the wombs of their mothers because their colour was black and condemned to a fate unbefitting a dog, for a crime committed and pre-judged – the fight for freedom and justice, against oppression and discrimination, the quest for equality and human dignity. None amongst us had been witness to the commission of this crime, and yet the picture spread before our very eyes told the whole story in graphic detail. The suffocating stench of death hung in the air, inducing feelings of nausea.

At the time of attack, there must have been between twenty and thirty patients admitted in the wards, mostly women and children. Add about fifteen medical assistants, two qualified doctors, four drivers and a token guard force of ten, and one could estimate that at least fifty comrades were in the base when the attack began. Fifty comrades, whose dream was to live in a free and democratic Zimbabwe. These were comrades who were willing to pay the supreme sacrifice not for their individual freedoms, but for the freedom of all the oppressed people in Zimbabwe.

Now all that was left were mounds of ashes in two burnt-out round huts. Those ashes told stories even more forcefully than an eyewitness account. The skulls had been totally burnt but defiantly held their form. You could count the number of victims, which we accurately did, by the remaining forms of their skulls – twenty-nine in the bigger hut and twenty-two in the smaller one, a total of fifty-one. Connected to each skull was an ash train, representing the body which, in addition to the suffering visited upon it by successive colonial administrations, had the additional God given responsibility of carrying the skull. As the grass huts burned, the flesh was the first to ignite and as it collapsed against the bone frame it had throughout its existence clothed and protected, it too became the fuel for the destruction of that it had sought to protect.

I saw in these ashes not just the remains of my comrades, but the shrieks of pain and suffering as the heat of the burning huts began to bake them alive and then violently tear away at their flesh and their very existence. I saw the pain and fear of the children as they clung to their mothers, beseeching them to come to their rescue and protection as they had so ably done before. I saw the pain and hopelessness of the parents, fighting not only to save their children, but themselves, knowing that other comrades who normally would come to their rescue were probably facing the same fate. I looked more closely at the ash remains and saw about twenty wire shackles that had tied the men's hands to their backs. The flesh and bones these shackles had imprisoned had in their final act of defiance slipped out of bondage and left them like spectacle frames without lenses, to tell the story.

I saw the barbarous Rhodesian forces gleefully watching, with guns cocked and ready, lest there be some able to escape from the terrible inferno. That was the face I had known all my life, vividly portrayed and painted by the ash remains of my comrades. This was the ugly face of death and destruction – the face that characterised the brutal nature of the Smith regime.

How could the estimate of the hospital's occupants closely match the actual mortality figures? This coincidence again told a story. On the first day of attack, the enemy dropped paratroopers in and around Parirenyatwa. The token guard force must have run out of ammunition trying to defend the base, and were eventually captured. Their hands were tied to their backs and they were thrown into one of the huts. The medical staff, many of whom could have managed to escape to safety, took the courageous decision that they could not escape and leave their patients to their fate. They tried to take their patients to safety with them. A few of the patients were amputees, some were too young or too old to be able to escape the enemy's net, and others were too sick to move on their own.

The superior enemy, enjoying close air support, overcame them all and the able-bodied male nurses had their hands tied to their backs before being thrown with the rest into the two huts. The two huts had each two crudely constructed beds meant to accommodate two comrades. All the fifty-one comrades had been crammed into these two huts. Even without burning down the huts, most of the comrades would have suffocated to death.

The ashes before us had brought into sharp focus the diametrically opposed ideologies pursued by the Smith regime and that charted by our revolution. The former represented death and destruction and all the forces of evil, and the latter hoped for a brighter future which respects human life and treats it with dignity.

A shallow grave was dug where their bodies had fallen and with solemn dignity we laid their ashes to rest and commended their souls to the Almighty. As darkness enveloped the sky, our work was done, at least for today, and with my escort we were headed for the National Stores. One member of the escort picked up a thermometer as we were leaving Parirenyatwa and was strongly rebuked by another comrade who had observed him doing so, for disobeying instructions given in the morning not to take anything. Annoyed by the unnecessary fuss over a mere thermometer, the rebuked comrade rather than throw the thermometer down, threw it far away as a way of venting his anger. That saved his life and that of the comrades near him. As the thermometer made contact with the hard ground there was such a loud explosion, we couldn't believe it had been caused by a thermometer. Evidently the enemy had, before leaving the base, planted some high explosive objects so that they could continue causing death or injuries long after they had left.

By the time we got to the National Stores, the majority of the search parties had already received their rations and finished eating. Many had retired to sleep after a gruelling and stressful day. I too wanted to retire early to bed after receiving a brief of the day's events from Comrade Mao.

Luck was not on my side. My customary bath before bed was interrupted. The three days of bombardments had made me skip my daily routine that guaranteed me refreshing sleep every evening and I had looked forward to settling into the routine once again, starting from today. There was commotion and shouts of "Comrade Dragon, Comrade Dragon" as comrades frantically sought to talk to me. I called back that I would be with them in a minute, and without drying myself I jumped into my trousers and finished putting on my shirt on the move.

"What has happened?" I enquired nervously as I neared where the comrades were anxiously waiting for my arrival.

"About five minutes ago eight comrades suddenly became hysterical. It was as if they had become possessed by some evil spirits," the most senior

amongst the comrades quickly explained. "They were saying meaningless words and tearing away at their clothes," he continued.

"What happened to the weapons they were carrying?" I was immediately concerned that in their deranged state they might turn their guns against their comrades with disastrous consequences.

"We managed to disarm them. Fortunately their interest in their weapons was not to use them but to destroy them. By the time we managed to subdue and disarm them, two rifles had been broken in halves, and they were all foaming in their mouths," concluded the comrade.

"Let me quickly put on my shoes and we can go to see how they are feeling now." I had left the bath so hurriedly that I did not have the time to put on my shoes, but I had carried them in my arms.

I was eager to witness the bizarre spectacle that had been reported to me. Soon we were on our way to where the incident had occurred, just about 150 metres away. We had hardly covered half the distance when another three comrades came rushing towards us.

"Comrade Dragon, Comrade Dragon," they shouted as soon as they were within earshot, "another five comrades are again hysterical, just like the first eight." There was panic in their voices and instinctively I knew this development would haunt us during the next few days.

We were able once again to subdue and disarm the latest victims of this strange illness. The symptoms they exhibited resembled exactly those that had been described to me a while ago. The first eight had been put in a room and placed under guard in case there should be a recurrence of the symptoms they had exhibited earlier on. I entered their room and they were all seated quietly with blank expressions on their faces.

After some consultations, I decided that the affected comrades should all be taken by lorry to Chindunduma Base for medical observation. Just in case the problem should resurface while on the move, I directed that they be accompanied by another ten men, preferably medics, to help to subdue them. When the lorry returned, I wanted it to bring about twenty able-bodied men to come and reinforce our numbers.

Thankfully there were no further developments on this first day of searching for the injured and burying the dead. It must have been about 1.30 am when I finally went to sleep.

Around 5.20 am I woke up, or rather I was woken up by some strange noises from outside the hastily constructed hut where I slept. I felt that I wanted to continue sleeping a little longer and had almost convinced myself that it was the right thing to do, when the noises outside my hut again attracted my attention. The noises did not sound human and yet we had no animals in our base, not even cats or dogs. Reluctantly I slid off my crude bed constructed from poles and grass and made my way outside.

Dawn was breaking and although it was not quite light yet, one could see objects about thirty metres away. There were no clouds in the sky and it promised to be a clear shiny day. The movement of a dog caught my attention. Strange indeed, we did not have dogs in the base and yet what I was seeing was certainly a very big dog. The dog was stealthily moving further away from my hut. I followed behind trying to see what the dog was up to. No, it was not one dog, maybe two or three. As I continued to follow, the dogs increased their speed and seemed to be contesting among themselves for possession of some food, maybe a bone. They further increased their pace and soon were out of view.

I had by now gone about forty metres from my hut and I decided it was time to go back. As I retraced my steps my foot stepped on what I first thought might be a tree branch, but the object seemed to have some softness. I stooped down to pick the object up so I could identify it. It was barely off the ground when, in utter revulsion, I threw it back to where it had come from. The mystery object was not a tree branch; it was a human hand! What I had just been following were not dogs, but a pack of jackals. The significance of this find was too ghastly and sickening to comprehend. While we slept the jackals were awake, ravaging through the shallow graves for what we held so dear. Disgusted and dejected, I blew an emergency whistle.

By the time the emergency parade ended, there was gloom and outrage amongst all the comrades at the desecration of the sanctity of our fallen heroes. The outrage was directed not at the jackals, they had done nothing wrong except to answer the call of their natural instincts, but at the Smith regime and its British colonial masters. It was that regime that carried out the massacres, and it was that regime that must shoulder the burden of responsibility for any deaths, injuries or bizarre occurrences. The gloom was resultant from the painful loss of the dear departed comrades, but also from the realisation that the tortuous burials completed yesterday had to be

redone today. None amongst the comrades was aware that Comrade Tongogara had already made arrangements with the Mozambican authorities to assist with bulldozers to dig mass graves.

The second day of searching for the injured and burying our dead had begun on a very sad note. More than fifty percent of the shallow graves in which our comrades were buried yesterday had been ravaged, and body parts could be seen strewn all over the battlefield; an overwhelming stench of death could be smelt wherever one went.

A human body is the most expendable piece of trash one can think of. Extinguish the flame of life and during the first day you are burying a comrade you have known and loved with all the dignity and reverence befitting his status in life. The second day the features are puffed but still recognizable. An odour like a protective shield creates a distance between the deceased and those comrades he held so close and so dear in life. The living comrades cover their mouths in order not to feel the revolting ‘breath’ of the dead. By the third day a metamorphic transformation has taken place. The body is cooked and begins to tear away when gently pulled. The odour is now repugnant. All the living would wish to do is to quickly dispose of the bodies in a two-metre deep hole, cover the hole with earth and, to be certain, put stones on top to ensure the odour does not escape from the body that created it.

What then is a comrade? Certainly not the stinking flesh that we bury. A comrade and comradeship is the resilient spirit that resides in a body. When the flesh ceases to exist the spirit frees itself, multiplies and finds other bodies to occupy. The enemy, no matter how strong, can destroy the body but not, and never, the spirit. It is precisely for this reason that Mbuya Nehanda prophesied that her ‘bones’ would arise to continue the struggle. ‘Bones’ was a prophetic reference to the undying revolutionary spirit that would find other human forms to reside in and prosecute the struggle until final victory.

By 10 am two bulldozers from the Mozambican government had arrived and started tearing away furiously at the hard stubborn ground. The earth had found its match and reluctantly gave in. When another two bulldozers arrived two and half hours later, one mass grave had been completed and the gruelling task of filling it with the corpses of our fallen heroes had begun in earnest. I had reorganized my men for the changed circumstances of the second day. About 250 comrades were to continue searching far and

wide for the injured and the remains of the dead. This task would continue to be coordinated by Comrade Mao. Another 300 comrades under my direct supervision were to exhume the remains of those buried in shallow graves yesterday, search for body parts strewn around from the vandalized graves, and carry newly discovered bodies, all for burial or reburial in the mass graves. Using blankets and bed sheets we made many stretchers which we used to carry the corpses and the dismembered body parts. A few stretchers were reserved to carry the injured.

Periodically I received updates on the progress of the other search parties from Comrade Mao. As more bodies were discovered, these were carried back to the locations of the mass graves. The injured were placed at collection points to await pick-up by our lorry.

The comrades under my direct supervision were committed to their task and maintained their motivation. All had their mouths and noses covered with pieces of cloth to shield themselves from the pervasive odour of the decomposing bodies. I chose to remain ‘unprotected’ from the odour from the beginning to the very end of the burial process. I kept on speaking to the comrades and even cracked some jokes in the process of dumping the corpses into the mass graves. I even ordered dry rations to be distributed without pausing what we were doing and was the first to eat my ration right there on the mass grave, as the bodies of the comrades were continuing to pile up.

My behaviour was intended as a psychological ploy and therapy for the living not to take death too seriously. In my mind’s eye, I saw not the decaying corpses of the comrades, but their liberated spirit, the undying revolutionary spirit that had cheated death. And as we committed ‘dust to dust’, I found strength and comfort from the knowledge that there still were many comrades into whose bodies the liberated spirits would find a home from which to continue the struggle.

I was satisfied with the progress we had made by 2.30 pm. All the shallow graves we dug yesterday had been emptied of their contents; one mass grave was already full and the second one was already two-thirds full. We had collected the body parts that had been scattered all over the battlefield. I meticulously kept a record of the numbers of all the comrades we were burying.

Just when I thought everything was going well, a complication arose which threatened to bring to a halt the work we were doing. Out of the blue,

about ten comrades became hysterical. I ordered the unaffected comrades to subdue them. They were succeeding in this endeavour when among them fourteen more became hysterical. The numbers of the affected comrades rose to thirty-one, then forty-three, and finally fifty-six.

Until yesterday I had never been confronted with cases of mass hysteria. The thirteen cases yesterday had seemed to me a massive number – now today a staggering fifty-six! We succeeded in subduing all the fifty-six comrades, but not before seven of them had thrown themselves over the corpses in the mass grave that was just over two-thirds full. One had to see the drama that unfolded in order to believe it. None of the unaffected could be ordered or persuaded to venture into the grave to assist in bringing them out. Others had actually run away from the graveside for fear of ending up in the grave themselves. Although I had unsuccessfully tried to persuade some comrades that we go down together to bring the seven comrades out, deep inside me I was also afraid of the undertaking and, while I didn't show it, I was relieved that they refused. In the end, we waited until the effects of the hysteria had waned and we persuaded the seven to come out on their own with very limited assistance from outside. Fortunately, there were no further cases of mass hysteria.

We continued with the burials, but the morale of the comrades had been severely affected. All the victims of mass hysteria had to be transported to Chindunduma Base and replacements had to be sought. Despite the late afternoon drama, reports from Comrade Mao suggested that fewer corpses were being found. His search parties were conducting properly targeted sweeps to ensure no dead or injured comrades were left behind. If this trend were to continue, we would be winding up our operations the next day.

My happiness at the encouraging reports was short-lived.

“Comrade Dragon, we have just discovered a scene of a massacre and I think it is absolutely necessary that you come and view it before we start removing the bodies,” Comrade Mao beseeched over the radio.

“What is it again, I thought a while ago you expressed optimism that our task was almost done,” there was despondency in my voice.

“Indeed, Comrade Dragon. There is a gorge that leads in the direction of Chimoio town where no one had suspected there could be dead bodies. From above it is difficult to see the bodies. A comrade who sought the privacy of the gorge to relieve his bowels stumbled on the gruesome discovery,” Comrade Mao explained apologetically.

I knew exactly what place Comrade Mao was referring to. On the first day of the attack I had seen the Rhodesian soldiers being parachuted into that general area. I thought then that the intention of this enemy deployment was to intercept and kill any comrades who tried to use this route to escape to Chimoio town. To thwart these machinations I had deployed some of our forces in an area adjacent to where the enemy had occupied ground with the specific responsibility to prevent comrades from going in that direction. I had correctly interpreted the enemy's intentions and had taken the right preventive measures. How come then that a massacre is alleged to have taken place? Could it be that my men did not perform their duties efficiently or maybe by the time their deployment was effected the massacre had already taken place?

The scene of the massacre had not been disturbed on the insistence of Comrade Mao that I must see it first. The gorge was narrower at the top and wider at the bottom, probably due to the erosion of the bottom sides by water flowing through it during the rainy season. The bottom of the gorge was thus transformed into some kind of caves that could easily conceal a few people. If there were massive numbers of comrades who sought a safe passage to Chimoio town through the gorge, it would be difficult to conceal them.

The base lying closest to the gorge was Mbuya Nehanda. The gorge lay about half a kilometre away from the base and stretched for some distance in the direction of Chimoio town. It was thus the obvious preferred escape route for the occupants of Mbuya Nehanda Base who faced the risk of falling victim to the enemy's ferocious bombs. The base's occupants were female comrades and at the early morning hour when the bombardments began, the drift of male comrades from other bases had not begun. As I looked at the heaps of female corpses huddled together, I knew these were occupants of Mbuya Nehanda Base who in their bid to escape had seen the gorge as their safe passage and their togetherness as their source of strength. The enemy either had prior intelligence of the existence of the gorge or was attracted by the large numbers that flocked into it, when he parachuted his forces to annihilate any who sought its sanctuary.

In this cold-blooded and indiscriminate massacre, more than 100 comrades were shot and killed at close range. Even in death the comrades clung to each other, refusing to separate as if to do so was an act of betrayal of one another.

Already it was after 5 pm and in an hour's time it would be getting dark. I reinforced the search parties with some comrades who were under my direct command so that we could remove all the bodies that were in the gorge today. The stench of death was overwhelming and multitudes of flies buzzed in noisy protest at any encroachment.

We worked late into the evening burying our dead. I had resolved that all the comrades in the gorge should be buried tonight, thinking that the task would not take more than three hours. My calculations were completely off the mark. I had not taken into account the fact that when it got dark it would be difficult to extract the bodies from the gorge. Darkness itself became an annoying obstacle, not because of bad visibility, but because of the psychological fear that the combination of dead bodies and darkness creates in the minds of people, especially those who are superstitious. At one juncture we had to halt what we were doing until we had brought enough lights to illuminate the area we were working in, since only a handful of comrades could be persuaded to go below in the dark.

It was almost midnight when the job was finally done. We were all tired, every one of us, but filled with utmost satisfaction that we accorded our comrades as dignified a burial as we could possibly give. Judging by the isolated discoveries of bodies during the late afternoon, excluding of-course the gorge discoveries, the burials of our comrades were coming to an end. Comrade Mao's brief confirmed this position.

I was thankful that we did not have further cases of mass hysteria. When I finally went to sleep, just after 2 am, there was absolute quietness in the base. The hard work that the comrades had been involved in during the last two days acted as a sedative, helping them to fall into deep slumber. They deserved the rest.

Burials – Day 3

On the third day I increased significantly the number of comrades in the search parties by reducing the comrades under my direct supervision, leaving only a token number. I wanted us to conduct a thorough sweep of all our bases and the surrounding areas to make sure that no injured or dead comrade was left behind.

By 10 am only two bodies had been found, although quite a large area had been covered. I kept in touch with Comrade Mao who informed me that there were no further sightings of the dead or injured. In his estimation it

might take another three to four hours to complete the sweeps. Unless there were unexpected new finds, I was now in a position to give to the Party the official figure of the comrades who died at Chimoio. At this stage I could only estimate the numbers of those who were injured because some had reached Chimoio town, Gondola and other health centres without our knowledge.

At 4 pm I raised Comrade Mao again to get an update on the progress and was pleased to know that he had checked with the other four search commanders and they confirmed that no further corpses or injured comrades had been located.

“You should now inform them that I want all the comrades to be at the National Stores not later than 5.30 pm so that we can officially wind up our operation,” I ordered.

“I have already instructed them to meet me at the HQ so that we can proceed to the National Stores together. They should arrive at this location any minute now,” Comrade Mao responded.

“Good. Just let me know when they all arrive, and remember once again, not later than 5.30 pm at the National Stores.”

With the few comrades I had remained behind with we were finishing filling up the five mass graves with earth and just putting the final touches. Everything was going smoothly and soon when everyone assembled I would address them and express my deepest gratitude to all the comrades for their tireless commitment to giving their dead comrades their last respects. I was rehearsing in my mind how best to express myself, when I was interrupted by radio communication from Comrade Mao.

“Comrade Dragon, all the four search commanders are now here. We are about to set off for that location and hope to be there between 5 and 5.15.”

“Well done. See you all soon,” I concluded and continued with my thought process. My address must highlight the fact that the blood of our comrades lay on the hands of the Rhodesian regime and their British colonial masters. The only way to avenge their deaths was to pick up their guns and continue the struggle they were waging until final victory. After my address, the comrades must feel inspired. Again my thoughts were interrupted. Who could this be? About five minutes ago I had just spoken to Comrade Mao and I did not expect any interruptions from anyone else.

“Comrade Dragon, may I please speak to Comrade Dragon.” There was urgency and fear in the voice. I could not say whose voice it was; certainly

it was not Comrade Mao's voice. It mattered not who it was, I wanted to know the reason for the panic.

"This is Comrade Dragon, can I help you?"

The comrade on the other end was so panicky that he did not seem to understand what I said or recognise my voice.

"I said I want to speak to Comrade Dragon, and it's urgent." The comrade sounded hysterical.

I lost the calmness I had when I first responded to the comrade's enquiry. The desperation in his voice had a chilling effect on me and I began to panic too. Thoughts about how I would address the comrades were pushed aside, and I shouted over the radio, "This is Comrade Dragon, what has happened?"

"Oh my God!" the comrade could not conceal his grief, "five comrades have eaten poisoned food and they are in terrible pain."

How could this happen at this juncture when we considered our task finished. From the first day we began our burials I made it very clear that we could not guarantee the safety of any food except that at the National Stores which during and after the attack was always under our guard. Every morning we gave the comrades their dry rations for the day and I had instructed Comrade Mao to emphasise that no other food except their rations was to be eaten. If these comrades had listened to my instructions and the daily warnings they got from Comrade Mao, they would not be in the state they were now.

"Quickly give them lots of milk to drink; it might help lessen the effects of the poison."

"There is no milk here. The comrades are writhing from excruciating pain. Please help."

"I will send some milk down there right away." Then it dawned on me that I had not asked about where the incident occurred. "By the way, where are you located right now?"

"At the HQ," responded the comrade without any delay.

"Who am I speaking to anyway?" I enquired. By this time the comrades who had heard my conversation had, without being urged to do so, prepared lots of milk and were waiting to be told where to take it to.

"Comrade Tererai," was the quick reply.

"If you are at the HQ let me talk to Comrade Mao." The question at the back of my mind was why Comrade Mao had not reported this incident to

me himself, unless of course the incident happened after he had left.

“Comrade Mao is one of the affected comrades.”

I was shocked. My mind was in turmoil and I did not know what to think, what to say, or what to do. What tragic irony, Comrade Mao of all the people, the one who delivered my message daily to the comrades not to eat anything except the rations from the National Stores, the one who above anyone else knew my concerns about the possibility of the enemy poisoning our foodstuffs. Had I not heard correctly? Of course I had. What could have tempted him so much to want to eat?

“Comrade Dragon, are you still there?” Comrade Tererai was confused by my silence.

I became conscious of the comrades standing next to me holding a bucket of milk and instead of answering Comrade Tererai I vented my frustration on them. “What do you think you are doing standing there like statues when comrades are dying?”

“We don’t know where to take the milk,” one of them stated. Of course I had not told them where to go with the milk.

“Go with it to the HQ as quickly as you can.”

“Comrade Dragon, can you hear me please?” Again there was panic in Tererai’s voice.

“I am here, please go ahead.”

“One of the comrades has just died.”

The words were like a thunderbolt to my ears. It was now my turn to panic. “Who? Comrade Mao?”

“Not him. But all of them are frothing at the mouth and are in extreme pain.”

“The milk will be there shortly. As soon as it comes I want you to force them all to drink it.” Even as I said these words, I knew that it might be too late to save them. “What exactly did they eat?” I was now curious to know what could have tempted their appetites.

“Biscuits! There were packets of biscuits in one of the rooms. Comrade Mao picked one of them up and inspected it. He commented that there were no punch marks on the packet and so it meant the enemy had not tempered with it,” Comrade Tererai went beyond what he was asked but I did not mind because I was also curious to know everything. “He opened the packet and shared it with the others,” Comrade Tererai concluded.

"Ask one of the four search commanders to come over the radio." I wanted to know if Comrade Mao ate the biscuits in their presence and why they did not discourage him from doing so.

"They are the very ones who ate with him."

I felt dizzy. I had chosen the five fated comrades to spearhead the search for the injured and dead due to the faith I had in their command capabilities and above all because of their indubitable discipline – until today of course.

They had acquitted themselves wonderfully well all the way, but collapsed at the finish line. About this time I had hoped to be addressing all the comrades, thanking them for their unyielding spirit that enabled us to accord our fallen heroes the respect they earned and deserved. I had planned in my mental rehearsals to pay special tribute to Comrade Mao and his four search commanders for the manner in which they led the comrades to accomplish the difficult but necessary task.

"Comrade Dragon," the monotonous voice of the 'messenger of death' came over the radio, "two other comrades have died and only Comrade Mao is barely clinging to life." How else could I describe Comrade Tererai – each time he came over the radio, it would be to herald bad tidings.

"The comrades I sent with milk, haven't they arrived yet?" The poison must have been too strong and quick acting. Within a very short space of time four comrades had died and a fifth had reached the precipice of death. I was quietly making a silent prayer, 'Dear Lord I know you are there, and I know you answer my prayers. I have on numerous occasions walked through the valley of death and never have I lost faith that you would see me through.'

"They have just arrived comrade Dragon."

"Good, tell them to make Comrade Mao drink lots of it," There was a glimmer of hope in my mind.

"He can't drink; he has gone past that stage now." Again the angel of death breaking the final straw I was clinging to.

"Shit, I don't care how he takes it – shove it down his goddamn throat if you must." As soon as the words escaped my mouth, my conscience told me I was damaging my case, the one I had started presenting to my Lord. 'Oh Lord of mercy, you know I am a sinner. There are so many ways I have wronged you, but I appeal to your gracious spirit not to punish Mao for my transgressions. And you know Lord, that even though I sin, my desire is to be good and to deserve being called Your son. Dear Lord, control my life

and my actions so that everything I do pleases you. And my Lord....,’ my silent prayer was interrupted by the messenger of death.

“Comrade Dragon,” Comrade Tererai’s sad voice came over the radio.

“You don’t have to say it, I already know,” I interrupted the messenger of death, “Comrade Mao is dead,” I said as a matter of fact. “Isn’t that right?” I sought confirmation of my worst fears.

“I am afraid you are right comrade Dragon. How did you know?” Comrade Tererai expressed surprise.

I ignored the question. “I want the five bodies brought here right away,” I said firmly and dismissively.

Earth mounds about half a metre above ground level represented the locations, lengths and widths of the mass graves in which our dead comrades, the heroes of our ‘Chimurenga Chechipiri’ lay in eternal peace and silence. In life they had stood together, side by side, defending each other against all forms of aggression from the colonial enemy. In death they lay together, side by side, to be immortalised in the annals of Zimbabwe’s history as true revolutionaries and liberators, who paid the supreme sacrifice for the cause of freedom and independence.

In my heart of hearts, I dedicated myself to be forever faithful to the cause for which they had laid down their lives. In my heart of hearts, I would be forever grateful to the comrades who, having survived the enemy bombs and bullets, had given our dead heroes as dignified a burial as possible under the prevailing circumstances. On this day, I had planned and quietly rehearsed a fitting tribute for both the dead and the living, to be delivered in my address to mark the end of the burials. For the living, I had planned to single out for special mention the five comrades who had spearheaded our burial operations. Now they were no more, having succumbed to the very temptation they had themselves implored all the comrades to resist – not to eat any food except that provided at the National Stores.

When the five bodies arrived everyone was on parade to give them a heroes’ welcome. There was a sombre mood amongst all the comrades gathered to give a final and befitting tribute to our heroes. One of the mass graves had already been reopened in readiness to welcome the five commanders to their final resting place alongside the other dead heroes that they had worked so hard to afford a decent burial to. After a short, moving ceremony we buried the last five of our heroes. These last comrades

brought the total number of comrades who died at Chimoio to 785. While I directly supervised the burial of our comrades into five mass graves around the National Stores, the total number of mass graves, including those at other bases like Takawira 2, the HQ, etc., came to fifteen.

Throughout the attacks on our bases and during the process of burials and the caring for the wounded, I had needed all my courage and tenacity. Whatever emotions I had felt, I showed no outward signs. Now that the job was done, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the enormity of the events of the last six days. I barely could manage to conceal the emotions that threatened to spill over and for the first time become visible to those around me. Before this could be allowed to happen, I decided to find a secluded place where I could allow my emotions to boil over in solitude.

I stood up to move, but my right leg refused me. It seemed there was a numbness spreading from my thigh down to my foot. I rubbed my leg with the palm of my hand, hoping that the heat generated by the friction would ease the numbness away. On past occasions I had dealt with numbness to my leg or arm in this manner and with dramatic effect. I had no doubt at all that this unconventional therapy would still have the same effect today.

As the palm of my hand began its familiar procedure, I felt a sharp pain as it passed the mid area of the leg. I winced but decided to ignore the pain. As the palm began its upward movement, I put a bit more pressure hoping the increased frictional heat would eliminate both the numbness and the pain I had felt a while ago. An involuntary scream escaped through my lips as an even sharper pain was caused to my leg. I carefully inspected my leg to identify the cause of my pain. The end of a metal fragment embedded in my leg could just be seen. This was a fragment from a bomb that had pierced my leg on the first day of attack just after I had managed to retrieve a gun and ammunition from my dead comrades, but could not feel until today because of the intensity of the enemy's aggression and the therapeutic concentration on the burials.

As I was driven to a clinic in Chimoio to have the fragment removed, the boiling emotions that had threatened to erupt and spill over were conveniently camouflaged by the pain of the fragment in my leg.

By all accounts, what happened at Chimoio during the period 23–25 November, 1977 can only be described as genocide by the barbarous colonial regime, one of the many such acts in the history of our struggle for freedom and independence.

Epilogue – The Dream

I took a lift in an old Peugeot 404 from Chimoio town to Umtali. On many occasions I had travelled between these two towns and the longest time I took, in a bus, to cover this distance had been one and half hours. Today it took over three hours to travel the same distance. The car must have been a 1960 model for it surely must have outlived its usefulness. After every two or three kilometres it coughed, sputtered and stopped.

The owner was familiar with the problem and before alighting to investigate, or better still, to resolve the problem, he called to one of the passengers, whom I later learned was his assistant, to alight first and put some stones behind the rear wheels to prevent the car from rolling backwards. Obviously the handbrake was not functioning and he did not trust that leaving the car in gear would stop it from the backward motion. That done, he alighted followed by his passengers, altogether eight in a sedan meant to carry only four passengers.

Calmly, the driver opened the bonnet of the car to reveal a leaking and boiling radiator. He then explained to all his passengers that it was necessary to keep the bonnet open for fifteen to twenty minutes to allow the radiator to cool off before he could attempt to start the engine. I peeped into the engine. The only thing that made the car a Peugeot was its body. The engine had parts from many different models – the carburettor belonged to a Ford, the starter was that of a Mazda. Even bicycle spokes and tire tubes helped to keep the engine from falling apart.

In the meantime, the assistant after pegging the rear wheels took a twenty-litre tin from the boot to go and look for water from the nearest village. On his return, the water was poured into the leaking radiator and we the passengers were asked to push start the car.

“Why don’t you start the car in reverse?” I enquired as the driver ordered his passengers to push the car forward up the slope. “It is easier to let it roll backwards down the slope,” I proffered my advice based on my knowledge of cars.

The driver threw an accusing glance in my direction, irritated that a passenger should lecture him on what to do with his car, and gave an icy response, “This car does not start in reverse. You better push hard if you want us to go, and stop playing an expert.”

Each time it appeared the car wanted to start, it would go into convulsions and backfire loudly through the exhaust pipe and then go silent.

We had pushed the car for almost 100 metres and our clothes were drenched in sweat when finally it went into the now familiar convulsions, but this time it started. The driver ordered us to jump into the car while it was in motion, afraid that if he stopped it the engine would stall. This was a dangerous manoeuvre, especially considering that the car was overcrowded. When the last passenger had just got in, the engine cut off. We disembarked and restarted the formula.

Finally we were able to make the car start and were on our way to Umtali. After travelling another five kilometres, the car stalled again. As we waited for the engine to cool off before we could attempt to push start it, a tractor passed by and I pleaded with its driver to give me a lift to Umtali. I left the Peugeot and its passengers behind, but not before the owner had made me pay the full amount I had been charged to get to Umtali. I chose not to argue about this obvious injustice, mainly out of fear of the owner's temperament.

We were two kilometres from the border post when the Peugeot I had left behind caught up with us. As it overtook us the owner/driver blew the horn incessantly for about half a minute and then he and his passengers threw punches into the air, out of their open windows, in mocking celebration that they had left me behind. Their attitude was so annoying and I was brooding over it when one kilometre further down the road we came upon their stalled vehicle. They looked away from our passing tractor as they waited for their engine to cool off. Even though the border was only a short walking distance away, the fate of the passengers was inextricably linked to that of the Peugeot 404 and its owner.

When I got to the long distance bus terminal in Sakubva, I was fortunate to find a bus revving its engine and ready to leave for Salisbury. I boarded the bus and was one of several standing passengers as the bus was full beyond its authorised capacity, and for most of the journey I remained a standing passenger.

It took us close to five hours to reach Salisbury. All along the way the bus made numerous stops – twice for it to refuel and on four other occasions, for the many human tankers amongst its passengers to refuel from the abundant restaurants and bottle-stores that dotted the road.

Soon after arriving in Salisbury I wasted no time in getting a bus that would take me on the last leg of my journey, to my rural home under Chief Madziva in Shamva district. So far, it seemed, the journey had been an

endless march in a desert of pain and hope. Would there be an end to the painful delays that delayed my reunion with my family and friends from whom I had been separated for the last three years? How were my parents, my brothers and sisters, with whom I had had neither contact nor word during my period of absence? I sincerely hoped that at least all of them were alive and in good health.

After a thirty-minute break in Bindura, the provincial capital of Mashonaland Central Province, there were no further lengthy delays, just brief stops to pick-up or drop off passengers, before I reached my final destination. The last forty minutes of my journey, though without any mishaps, were the most harrowing. Such was my impatience and my motivation to reach my destination, strangely contradictory and yet complementary emotions, I became conscious of every metre travelled and could feel the slow and agonising tick of every second.

At exactly 3.35 pm the bus stopped at my station. As I alighted, the impatience that had accompanied me disappeared and was replaced by hope and expectations. Expectations that soon, in the next fifteen to twenty minutes I would be re-united with my friends, especially Kennedy, and hope that their characters had not changed during the three years of our separation. The change from impatience to hope and expectation provided motivation with compatible partners.

We grew up together in the same village and our homes were only a kilometre and a half apart. From childhood we used to alternate playing at each other's homes. I viewed their parents as my very own and they too felt the same towards mine. Kennedy and David were born identical twins. So identical were they that an outsider could not distinguish one from the other, were it not for the scar on David's cheek. This scar was hardly visible from a distance and did not spoil David's handsome appearance – it just added an interesting dimension to it. In addition to their identical appearances, the twin brothers had identical voices and wore identical clothes. They even attended the same schools and graduated as lawyers from the same university. After completion of studies, they worked for the same law firm and, later in life, married identical twin sisters.

Up to High School I too went to the same schools and was in the same classrooms with them. I knew Kennedy and David so well and could easily identify the subtle differences in their appearances and their voices that others could not detect.

From the bus stop I began my two-kilometre walk home. I realised with a sense of guilt that the focus of my motivation had shifted away from my home and family and towards my twin friends. In my perception, my friends had somehow become two features on one side of the coin, and I, the other side of that same coin. Kennedy, my closest friend, was the dominant feature on their side with David providing the inconspicuous but necessary background to it.

Their home was closest to the main road, only one and a half kilometres from the station where I had alighted. I could see smoke billowing from the thatched roof of their kitchen, a sure sign at least that there were people at their home. As I walked along the footpath my mind was divided between ensuring I did not veer off the narrow footpath and fantasising about what our reunion would be like. By going to Mozambique alone without taking them with me, or even informing them of my intentions, I had betrayed the bond of friendship and the ‘oneness’ that our upbringing had forged amongst us. Ours had appeared to be an inseparable relationship with a common destiny. Sometimes the relationship between friends is much stronger and more enduring than between family members.

I was now closer to their home and could clearly observe the activities that were taking place in their courtyard. Mrs Chademana appeared at the kitchen door holding a big round clay pot in her hands. I assumed she was going to fetch water from a well about 300 metres away. Our eyes met and the pot slipped from her hands and fell to the hard ground beneath, breaking into small pieces. She seemed unperturbed by the loss of her prized possession and instead started running towards me, ululating at the same time. I too had begun sprinting towards her, each of us unable to control the emotions that our reunion generated.

Mr Chademana, who had his back turned to me as I approached their home, was at first perplexed when his wife broke the pot. Knowing how much she loved that pot he was undecided whether to rebuke or console her. But when she began running and ululating at the same time, he mistook these joyful gestures for fear and panic. Quickly he picked up the hand axe that lay beside him, jumped up from the wooden stool he was seated on and hastily took off after his wife, ready to confront any challenge that had caused her so much fear and panic. Then he saw me closing the gap separating me from his wife. He too was filled with joy and threw down the hand axe whose purpose had been swept aside by the emotions of reunion.

He increased his pace, not to catch up with his wife but to outdo her in welcoming me.

As our bodies came into contact our outstretched arms encircled one another, the thrill of reunion after three years separation determining our actions. These joyous expressions culminated in one trying to lift the other off the ground. I was the stronger and taller of the two and won this undeclared weightlifting contest with ease.

“Oh mom,” I kept repeating these two words while at the same time trying to overcome the exhaustion from the race to reunite and the effort of keeping an adult woman, about my size, suspended in air.

“My dear son,” she kept on responding with some effort as my encircling arms seemed to be squeezing her breath from her body.

More out of tiredness than the desire to do so, I lowered her body to the ground.

Mr Chademana had by now reached us. The same emotions that had drawn Mrs Chademana and me to each other, once again took charge. I let Mrs Chademana go and turned to affectionately hug her husband.

“Oh father, how very nice to see you after such a long time,” I held his body in a tight embrace and we let our emotions flow through each other. Tears of joy trickled down my cheeks and for a minute or two I kept clinging on to him, speechless. As I regained my composure I began to think, ‘mine is the return of the Biblical prodigal son, except of course that my two loyal brothers, the ones that stayed behind, were not in sight to welcome me. Maybe they were visiting their in-laws accompanied by their wives.’

We began to speak at the same time. In our culture if this occurs the younger person gives a chance to the older one to speak first. I stopped speaking and Mrs Chademana continued with what she wanted to say.

“I was just saying,” she went on, “where did you leave your brothers?”

Not only had we spoken at the same time, but we also wanted to raise the same subject. The question coming from her, as it did, took me by surprise. Surely she can’t be talking of my friends, Kennedy and David; she must be referring to my biological brothers, David and Jacob. “Which brothers are you talking about, mom?”

“Your brothers, Kennedy and David.”

I was thunderstruck. My face must have betrayed my confusion.

“You seem puzzled and confused, is something the matter?” Both Mr and Mrs Chademana’s countenances reflected the concern that was written all over my face.

“I had hoped that after three years separation I would reunite with them today,” I responded.

“My son,” Mr Chademana began, “three weeks and three days after you left three years ago, your brothers left us saying they were going to look for you.”

“But they did not know where I had gone, I never told them or anyone for that matter.”

“I asked them where they hoped to find you,” Mr Chademana seemed lost in his thoughts and appeared not to have heard what I had just said, “and Kennedy responded that he did not know since you never gave them even a hint that you were going away. However, he said his intuition told him you must have gone to Mozambique.”

The joys of reunion were now overshadowed by the sad awareness that none of us knew where my friends – their children – could be found. I spent a few more minutes with the family, during which time I learned that two years after my friends had also disappeared, their wives opted to go and live with their parents while awaiting their return.

As I bade farewell to my friends’ parents, the faces I saw were not theirs, but those of my own parents. That’s when I woke up (in my dream).

Now I was in Mozambique. During these past three years I was a director of a machine-building plant. Amongst my 100-man workforce were Kennedy and David, my boyhood friends who had come to join me in Mozambique. I gave them key positions in the company I worked for and they had earned my complete trust. They were so loyal, hardworking and innovative that I could not imagine even a day without them.

This morning when I woke up, I had had a strange but interesting dream. I could not remember all the exact details about the dream, but I knew it concerned me, Kennedy and David and our families. Somehow I felt an urge that I should share this dream with Kennedy and I hoped that once I started telling him about it, I would recall all the details.

Whenever I wanted to speak to Kennedy I always sent someone to go and call him to come to me, whether at my office or my house. Today I broke with this tradition and decided to pay him a surprise visit at his three roomed cottage. I wanted to share the fascinating dream with him as

quickly as possible. When I got there he was seated in his lounge with the door wide open and his back to the entrance. His suitcase was open and next to him as if he was packing his clothes to go on a journey.

“Surprise, surprise,” I called out to him as I got to his doorstep, “may I come in?” No response.

I could have sworn that he heard me because I shouted so loud that even if he had been asleep I would have woken him up. But then, I was a hundred percent positive that he was not asleep. I walked up to him and shook his right shoulder, while calling out his name. No response.

Somehow, an abnormal atmosphere seemed to exist in the cottage and my pressing concern was for his health and state of mind. The Kennedy I grew up with, respected and learned to trust, seemed like a stranger to me. I went around the sofa on which he was seated until I was in front of him. For all I knew, I could well be a transparent window through which he could see distant lands and distant objects, without me actually being an obstacle to his vision. He was in a trance and it seemed my words, as I tried to attract his attention, could not reach him in the distant land he found himself in.

I wanted to dash out and look for his brother David; maybe he had experienced this spectacle before and might know how to handle the situation. But then, how would I feel if I returned only to find him unconscious or even dead? What was going to happen when he broke the trance and returned to the world of the living? Fear and fascination helped me make up my mind – to stay put and see this spectacle through.

Finally a grin crossed his face, signalling ‘good bye’ to the invisible spirits that had kept him company in the journey back to the world of the living. The original purpose of my being there was lost and forgotten in this unfolding drama.

Just when I thought the worst was over, he shifted his gaze and stared directly into my eyes. It was as if for the first time he became aware of my presence. His eyes burned through me, sending a cold shiver down my spine. When he started talking I could not understand what he was saying for his voice had an unnatural slur to it, as if it was someone speaking from within and through him. After uttering some incoherent words for about three minutes, his voice became clearer and targeted. I was the target.

“Dragon, I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say.” At the mention of my name I was surprised and became very alert. He was deliberately slow in his speech. “I want you to take me out of this place

tonight without fail," he stated firmly. His eyes held me in a hypnotic trance and never let go.

"If you think this is a dream, ask yourself why you came here. Did you think it was the dream you had, that made you come?" I was dumbfounded by what he was saying. How did he know that I had come to tell him about my dream? I became more attentive and eager to know what he was going to say next.

"It's me who called you here. I want you to take me out of this place right away," he continued. "Take me far, far away, otherwise I shall not see tomorrow and you shall never see me again." His gaze remained fixed on me, appealing, beseeching and demanding. The words seemed not to come from Kennedy, but from some spirit that possessed his body and soul.

"And who are you?" I ventured to ask.

"Time is a luxury that you do not have on your side. Just do as I have asked and you will not live to regret it," he gave a short ominous laugh that increased the fear and anxiety I had felt for some time. For the first time his gaze shifted away from me, releasing me from its hold. The voice had seemed familiar, but I could not pin a face to it.

I was absolutely certain that the voice coming through Kennedy's mouth was not his. How then could I respond to a being I did not know? Who was I expected to take far away, since it was not Kennedy who had spoken? Even if it had been Kennedy, would it make any sense that I send my subordinate far away because he ordered me, his boss, to do so?

I was embroiled in these thoughts when he turned his face towards me; tears were rolling down his cheeks and his body began to shiver.

"Kennedy," I demanded, "why on earth are you crying?" My words had the effect of a whip lashing at him. From the quiet sobs, he began to wail loudly. His words were distinctly clear. "Oh please take me away, they are coming to get me," he kept on repeating.

I looked around in all directions, but could see no one and nothing that could cause a threat to him. He continued to wail and rant at the same time. Suddenly, he jumped up and made a dash for the door. I was overcome by fear and could not immediately follow him. After a few seconds I overcame the fear and ran after him.

Once outside the cottage I caught a glimpse of David, looking perplexed as his brother frantically sped away. I made a desperate bid to catch up with him, but by now he had opened a considerable distance between us and was

running faster than I did. I tried to increase my pace, but to no avail. The chase had been going on for approximately two minutes when, from the direction of Rhodesia, I saw four large birds flying towards us. As they reached Kennedy's position, one of them swooped down and with its huge powerful claws lifted him off the ground. With him dangling beneath its massive feathered body, it ascended quickly until the bird and its prey began to look like a tiny dot in the sky. Just when I thought I was going to lose sight of the two completely, the bird released its prey and continued with its flight out of my vision. My eyes were now riveted on its prey which, from the tiny dot in the sky, began to grow bigger and to take human form as it hurtled towards the hard ground beneath.

I watched helplessly the rapid descent of the bird's prey, my childhood friend, and just when I thought his hapless body would hit the ground and disintegrate, I closed my eyes in order not to see my moment of failure to serve my faithful friend at his hour of greatest need.

But the sound of the inevitable impact never came, instead a shrill voice was begging, "Comrade Dragon please save me," forcing me to open my eyes. The ground beneath seemed to have opened up and the plummeting body hurtled down into its cavernous belly. As I watched in total helplessness, the voice and fast disappearing form was not that of Kennedy, but of Kelvin my batman. I gave a sharp cry of pain and disbelief. My eyes searched for David in the vain hope that we would share the pain and irreparable loss that had visited us. But where once there stood David, I only saw Donaldson my other batman. In panic and sadness I wanted to get far away from the cottage that had brought me these misfortunes, but there was no cottage. I began to weep loudly and uncontrollably.

That's when I was woken up by my two batmen who were shaking me in near panic.

"Comrade Dragon, Comrade Dragon, please wake up. Are you feeling alright?" cried out Kelvin.

(There had been no journey to Rhodesia, no friends called Kennedy and David, no machine-building plant where I worked in Mozambique – it had all been a dream – a telling dream.)

* 'The dream' is revealed at the end of this chapter as an epilogue.

* 'Backward advance' because I was moving towards a location from which I had just come.

* Gondola is a growth centre situated about 22 kilometres from Chimoio town and about three kilometres from Chindunduma, a ZANLA school for youths.

* *Sekuru Kaguvu* (Uncle Kaguvu) was the spirit medium who, together with *Mbuya* (grandmother) Nehanda, inspired the First War of Liberation (*Chimurenga Chekutanga*, 1896–97). He surrendered in October 1897 and was executed in March 1898.

Chapter 9

ETHIOPIA

The first time I ever met Comrade Robert Mugabe was in 1976 when he came to Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters. I did not have the opportunity or the courage to speak to him then or during his two subsequent visits while I was there. I felt I was a nonentity, honoured to see my leader from a distance and content to join others in responding to his slogans. Two years later, I was hurriedly withdrawn from the battlefield and ordered to travel to Maputo to meet Comrade Mugabe. That was my first visit to Maputo and the first time I had the opportunity to shake hands with my president and talk with him one on one. Two weeks from that historic day, I had been briefed on my new assignment, issued with a British passport in my *nom de guerre*, and believe it or not, was on my way to Addis Ababa on appointment as the Chief Representative of ZANU to Socialist Ethiopia.

Since I had no first hand knowledge of Comrade Mugabe before joining the armed struggle and, to my knowledge, he had no personal knowledge of me, who convinced him that I was a suitable candidate for appointment to the prestigious responsibility of Chief Representative? At the time of writing this book President Mugabe is still alive and, therefore, I still have the opportunity to unravel the mystery from the man himself.

Could it be that the recommendation came from our Chief of Defence, Comrade Josiah Magama Tongogara? True, I became close and affectionately attached to Comrade Tongogara later in the struggle. True also, Comrade Tongogara hails from Shurugwi a small mining town in the midlands province of Zimbabwe and I, too, was born in Shurugwi where my father was working, but our ancestral home is in Gutu, in Masvingo province. I doubt that Comrade Tongogara could have associated the cadre known as Dragon Patiripakashata with Agrippah Mutambara born in Shurugwi. Besides, there is a much bigger Mutambara clan in Manicaland province than the one from Masvingo. These clans share a common name but no common ancestry. The majority of those who hear my surname today

mistake me as originating from Manicaland province. Having said all this, it was taboo in our struggle to seek to know the origin of a comrade. Comrade Tongogara had no tribal leanings and would have surprised and confused me if he had sought to find out where I came from. I believe Comrade Tongogara's affinity to 'Dragosh' (that's how he affectionately called me) was purely based on identifiable competencies during the struggle. I became closer to Comrade Tongogara after my appointment as a Member of General Staff. Unfortunately, Comrade Tongogara is now deceased and I can never get his side of the story.

The late General Solomon Tapfumaneyi Mujuru, or Comrade Rex Nhongo as he was known during the struggle, was the first to be more familiar to me than Comrade Tongogara and Comrade Mugabe. He was the overall commander of ZIPA which was the engine driving our struggle during the period senior ZANLA commanders, including Comrade Tongogara, were languishing in Zambian jails between 1975 and 1976. Comrade Rex Nhongo frequented the ZANLA camps and it is probable that my promotion to Member of General Staff was recommended to him by those who were already Members of High Command or General Staff. It was faster to get promoted if you were assigned to assist in training recruits than when deployed in operational areas. Comrade Nhongo was the one who chose me to train a commando group and was responsible for my deployment to the operational areas on special missions. I believe he had a lot to do with my accelerated promotion. Like Comrade Mugabe and Comrade Tongogara, I do not come from the same area as Comrade Nhongo. Whatever role he played I can never confirm from him because he is also now deceased. Wherever the truth resides, I found myself posted to Socialist Ethiopia to represent ZANU.

Ethiopia bridged the geographic divide with Zimbabwe to become a true Frontline State through its immense contribution to our struggle. From the ZANU perspective, its contribution surpassed that of some contiguous Frontline States and was comparable to that of Tanzania and Mozambique.

Besides, Ethiopia was of strategic value to our struggle as its capital, Addis Ababa, is the permanent home of the headquarters of the African Union (AU), formerly the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Enlisting the undivided support of all African governments for our struggle was a vital step in pressuring the international community to accept the legitimacy of, and lend support to, our struggle. Ethiopia thus provided a platform for

ZANU to garner widespread recognition from amongst African governments many of whom, in the early stages of our struggle, wanted ZANU to fight under the banner of ZAPU led by Dr Joshua Nkomo.

The OAU secretariat headed by a Secretary General was identified as the vein through which appeals for support for our struggle could be pumped into the hearts of every African Head of State and government. It was thus imperative that a rapport be established between the ZANU office in Addis Ababa and the Secretary General's office if progress was to be made in broadening the ZANU support base.

The sturdy leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Mengishtu Haile Mariam, and the personal chemistry that developed between him and Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe, cemented a relationship that went beyond the successful completion of Zimbabwe's armed struggle and saw President Mugabe reciprocate a favour by providing asylum to his friend after he was toppled from power. What was even more remarkable about Chairman* Mengishtu's relationship with ZANU is the fact that he was affiliated to Russia, while ZANU was allied to China. All governments allied to Russia were expected to support ZAPU led by Comrade Joshua Nkomo, and not ZANU. As alluded to earlier, the term 'authentic six' was used to distinguish those liberation movements in Africa that were allied to Russia. This was in reference to MPLA in Angola, PAIGC in Guinea Cape Verde, FRELIMO in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia, ANC in South Africa, and ZAPU in Zimbabwe. When it became evident that ZANU was the Party that bore the main brunt of the armed struggle in Zimbabwe, the Russians through their closest ally, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), wooed ZANU to close ranks with ZAPU and abandon the Chinese camp. In return, ZANU would be guaranteed unlimited support from Russia and its allies, especially in the form of modern and more sophisticated weaponry. ZANU rejected the offer and vowed never to accept being blackmailed into switching allegiance.

It is in the context of the above that the magnitude of the support rendered to ZANU by Chairman Mengishtu, against the wishes of his main backers and whilst embroiled in a bitter civil war, which subsequently toppled him from power, can be judged. He gave military training to 1,000 ZANLA cadres and later to a corresponding number to ZIPRA cadres and armed them with Russian weaponry. Had the war not ended when it did, he had promised to train and arm thousands more ZANLA cadres. In addition

to troop training, Ethiopia was training ZANLA pilots, maintenance technicians and ground crews.

I would have preferred to remain in the battlefield. However, I did recognize that I was now going to shoulder an equally important and onerous responsibility. I was not exactly sure though how I was to discharge my new assignment as Chief Representative of ZANU to Socialist Ethiopia.

I reflected over my experiences as a guerilla commander with a view to extrapolating commonalities in strategy and approach. Both the military and diplomatic fronts had a single goal – to advance the cause of freedom and independence. In either case, the commitment and oneness of purpose of a commander, and those he commanded, were critical factors to achieving success. On the military front success was easy to gauge. It could be measured by how many engagements you had with the enemy, the number of enemy targets you destroyed and the enemy forces you killed or injured or captured, the support you enlisted from the masses, and your ability to minimise casualties on your side. The parameters for defining success on the diplomatic front were not so easily discernible and more dependent upon how much support you were able to marshal from potential allies.

ZANU Chief Representatives were drawn from trained guerillas as well as from students (mostly studying in capitalist countries) and other ZANU supporters who were not directly involved in armed struggle.

My staff was capable of delivering, but some had negative tendencies. On the administrative side I had only one comrade, Rodwell Hondo. To derive maximum utilisation of his competencies, I had to keep him under close supervision.

Occasionally Comrade Rodwell suffered from epileptic fits. In this condition he sometimes lost consciousness and experienced convulsions which caused him to bite his tongue. The seizures were always preceded by a headache. To avoid cutting himself, Rodwell kept a piece of wood which he placed between his upper and lower teeth whenever he felt he was about to have seizures. Once his clenched teeth trapped the tongue or piece of wood between them, no amount of force could disengage them. At times he would forget to carry the piece of wood with him resulting in deep cuts to his tongue. We simply would have to wait about five to 10 minutes before the process of disengagement commenced on its own.

I doubted that Rodwell had a driver's licence. But even if he had, I would not have allowed him to drive given his medical condition. Thankfully he

had never asked me if he could drive either of our two cars.

Not until the day the request came in a very unorthodox manner. We were at the Hilton Hotel, preparing to go to the airport to see President Mugabe off to Maputo. Whenever he came to Addis Ababa, Comrade Mugabe was always a guest of the Ethiopian government and would be accommodated at the five-star Hilton Hotel and provided with a chauffeur driven official car. We were in a jovial mood after Chairman Mengishtu had acceded to Comrade Mugabe's request to train a bigger number of ZANLA forces when the ongoing training of ZIPRA forces came to an end. I asked Comrade Rodwell Hondo, who had joined us in Comrade Mugabe's room, to put the President's suitcase in our car so that we could drive to the airport ahead of the president to carry out the check-in formalities. Having complied with the instruction, Rodwell returned as I was asking the President to excuse me.

"Comrade President, Comrade Dragon does not allow me to drive our cars." I was taken aback by the random and unexpected complaint from Rodwell.

"Do you have a driver's licence?" Comrade Mugabe enquired without casting a glance in my direction. The response was affirmative.

Comrade Mugabe switched his glance to face me and rebuked, "Why do you refuse to let him drive our cars?"

"He never told me he had a driver's license. Neither did he ever ask to drive," I responded apologetically. Without further ado I produced the car keys from my pocket and handed them over to Rodwell. I told him to go to the airport ahead of us to do the check-in procedures for Comrade Mugabe.

About thirty minutes later I sat next to Comrade Mugabe as we were driven to the airport. We arrived as people were beginning to board the plane, but Rodwell was nowhere to be found. After frantic efforts to find him, word reached us that the car Rodwell had been driving had been involved in an accident. Fortunately there had been no serious injuries.

The plane was delayed for almost twenty minutes to give time for President Mugabe's luggage to be brought from our immobilised vehicle.

Five months after this incident, Rodwell drove to our house/office one day with a cracked windscreen. I asked what had happened and he responded that some youths had thrown stones at the windscreen and then run away. I had no reason to disbelieve him.

One of my responsibilities as Chief Representative was to represent my party at international conferences. I found international conferences boring because most of the time I was a passive observer, unable to directly influence or contribute to the deliberations.

Meetings of the OAU were of greater significance to me. They provided the opportunity to network with representatives of African governments and sway their opinions about our struggle in favour of ZANU PF. The informal contacts outside the conference halls were thus more productive than the actual discussions conducted inside.

Conferences by the organs of the United Nations, such as the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), tended to be too technical and uninteresting. Besides, they added no real value to our struggle. The verbosity of the speakers, trying to outshine each other, got on my nerves and would send me to sleep. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was the organ that attracted my interest because of the large number of Zimbabwean ‘refugees’ in Mozambique.

I was attending one of these boring ECA conferences one morning. English was not the only official language of the conference, so I had plugged in earphones to receive automatic translations for languages other than English. I simply wanted to make believe that I was following the proceedings of the conference when in reality I had turned off the translation system and used the ear-plugs only to reduce the ‘noise’ filtering through my ears from the participants at the conference. I drifted into sleep and occasionally would be awoken by applause for a good speaker or noises from participants and squeaking furniture when proceedings were briefly adjourned for whatever reason.

At first I thought it was one of those disturbances that had woken me up and was preparing to go back to slumber when in my sleep induced stupor I realised there was a difference in the nature of the interruption. I tilted my head upwards and towering over me were two Ethiopian policemen. With a beckoning finger, one of the policemen bade me follow them.

“Are you the owner of a white Lada sedan (number plate given) parked outside?” one of the policemen enquired as soon as we were out of the conference hall.

“Yes I am,” I responded casting an inquisitive glance in his direction. Meanwhile we were walking towards where the car was parked.

“What happened to the windscreens?”

We had reached the car and the policeman was pointing at the cracked windscreens.

“Some unruly kids threw stones at it, causing it to crack,” I responded.

“Were you the one driving the car?” the policeman persisted.

“No. One of my comrades was.”

“Where is he now, or is it a she?”

“I left him at our office,” I responded beginning to sense that something must be terribly wrong.

“Take us to him. We want to question him immediately,” the policeman ordered.

“About what?” I asked.

“Regarding attempted murder,” the shocking response was unexpected, but made with conviction. Murder is not a word you normally associate with an accident. Maybe what the policeman meant was ‘culpable homicide’.

When we got to the office, Comrade Hondo was handcuffed and whisked away to the police station for questioning. He did not try to resist or protest against the police actions, suggesting that he was not surprised by what was taking place. He remained under remand for just over a week.

What had actually happened on the fateful day Rodwell alleged unruly kids had thrown stones at our car sounded like a script out of a movie. It was dusk and Rodwell was driving from a residential area in the outskirts of the city. An old man suddenly stumbled on to the road in front of him. Because of the speed at which he was driving he could not avoid hitting the old man. The man sustained injuries and was unconscious. Fearing that he was dead, Rodwell panicked. He looked around him and was satisfied that no one had witnessed the accident. If only he could leave the scene of accident without being noticed, no one would ever know it was him who had killed the man. To be absolutely certain the man was dead, Rodwell pulled at the unconscious form and laid him with his head in the path of one of the rear wheels. He got behind the steering wheel and reversed the car. Believing the man’s head had been crushed, Rodwell then sped away fast. Fortunately for the old man, he regained consciousness just in time to roll away from beneath the car. Also, unbeknown to Rodwell, someone had witnessed the incident, noted the car’s registration number and made a report to the police.

Through the police, I was able to make contact with the family of the victim. I was profusely apologetic about the conduct of my officer and assumed responsibility for the treatment and upkeep of the old man until full recovery. Periodically, I also bought grocery items for other members of the victim's family. At the end of two weeks I had become like a member of the family and was able to influence them to withdraw charges against my officer. Long after the old man had recovered, I remained very close to his family.

Another comrade with whom I had disciplinary concerns was Stalin Mau Mau. He was head of our Information and Publicity department. Stalin's main problem was that of self projection. The policy within ZANLA was always to project our President and none other. Even though the responsibilities of our office could be categorised as falling under the ambit of ZANU, as opposed to its military wing ZANLA, I insisted that our code of conduct be bound by the same ethos that bound ZANLA forces.

Comrade Mau Mau had printed posters of his portrait and had them posted in many places, including hotels. I took great exception to this and instructed that all his posters be recalled. He did not fully comply with the instruction, thereby leaving me with no other option but to have him recalled to our Headquarters in Maputo.

Comrade Mau Mau never reached Maputo. When he got to Dar-es-Salam he took a flight to Europe. That was the last I heard of him until after independence.

The co-existence of the ZANU/ZANLA cadres and the ZAPU/ZIPRA cadres was yet another major challenge. Over the past few months there had been simmering tensions between ZANU and ZAPU cadres, numbering about 13 and 27 respectively, training to be pilots and aircraft maintenance technicians at Ethiopian Airlines in Addis Ababa. The genesis of the problem could be traced back to Tatek Military Training camp, situated about 21 kilometres from Addis Ababa, where 1000 ZANLA cadres had completed military training and had been shipped back to Mozambique for operational deployment. A similar number of ZIPRA cadres had moved into the camp for similar training. Hardly a month after their arrival, a renegade group of about 14 ZIPRA cadres declared to Ethiopian officials their desire to switch loyalties from ZAPU to ZANU. The 14 immediately became targets for retribution by loyalist ZAPU cadres. The Ethiopian government had to order that they be separated and protected from the rest of their

colleagues. Later it was learned that Chairman Mengishtu Haile Mariam had signaled his willingness to accede to their demand.

Faced with the prospect of further defections and the attendant embarrassment it caused to the image of his organisation, the Chief Representative of ZAPU, Raphael Baleni, put the blame for the defections on my shoulders, the Chief Representative of ZANU, whom he accused of conniving with some Ethiopian instructors to recruit for ZANU from among the ZAPU cadres.

It became glaringly evident that the atmosphere between cadres at Ethiopian airlines from the two organizations was poisoned and polarized. The ZAPU representative and I agreed on the need to defuse the tensions between our cadres. We jointly organized a function at the ZANU office/residence one Saturday evening during which occasion we attempted to reduce tensions amongst the students by appealing for the projection of our national, rather than party identity, in our dealings with our hosts. We emphasised that there was nothing untoward for cadres from one party to freely associate with cadres from another party. By dwelling on the differences between our parties we were being injurious to the broader interests of our national struggle.

Despite all the wining and dining throughout the night, courtesy of contributions from various embassies based in Addis Ababa, the get-together ended without incident and there was high expectation that the tensions that had dogged us in the past weeks had finally been laid to rest.

The following Monday at around 1 pm, I was preparing to leave my office for a lunch break when the phone rang. The voice on the other end of the line was unfamiliar, but I soon established that it was from one of the ZAPU cadres studying at Ethiopian Airlines. Following the momentous get-together of the past Saturday I was curious, but not totally surprised, that a ZAPU cadre should ask to meet the Chief Representative of ZANU. I saw no reason at all why I should deny the ZAPU cadre the request he had made.

“By all means you can come to see me at my offices,” I responded, “what time do you intend to come?”

“We finish our classes at 5 pm and I will immediately catch a bus, maybe I will be there around 6 pm,” the ZAPU cadre replied.

I was embroiled in my office work at around 4 pm when the same ZAPU cadre phoned again.

“Comrade Dragon, I am informed that our classes will run late and I cannot be at your place at 6,” the young man said, “may I propose that we meet at 7 pm but not at your place, it is too far away from our school. If you don’t mind we can meet at the Rendezvous by the Revolutionary Square,” he concluded.

The Rendezvous is a restaurant located in a building overlooking the Revolutionary Square, a place famous for its fancy military parades to celebrate important national occasions. The Rendezvous was situated on the first floor and, as the building had no elevators, the only way to reach or leave the restaurant was by use of stairs.

It was approximately 6.45 pm when I pulled our car into the parking lot beneath the Rendezvous and, accompanied by Comrade Rodwell Hondo, we went up the stairs to the restaurant. There were about a dozen customers, some drinking tea or coffee and others nursing their beer bottles. We chose a table opposite the entrance/exit and, with our backs against the wall, were strategically positioned so that we could see whoever was entering the restaurant. A metre to my left was a door that led on to the balcony. Just after seven one of the ZANU cadres, Comrade Choto, doing an aircraft maintenance course at Ethiopian airlines, entered the restaurant and we beckoned him to come and join us. Moments after Comrade Choto joined us, and seeing that I now had company, Rodwell excused himself to go to our house to start preparing our supper, since we did not have a cook.

At 19.50 hours I told Comrade Choto that I would have to leave at 20.00 hours since the ZAPU cadre had not turned up at 19.00 hours as promised. I emptied my glass of beer in readiness to leave when I saw three ZAPU cadres entering the restaurant. I was expecting only one, but three had turned up. Odd as it seemed, I was not fussy about it. The trio came to the table where Choto and I were seated and took their seats on the opposite side of the table so that we were facing each other. I offered to buy the three some drinks, but they all politely refused. I then enquired from the cadre who had rung me earlier why he wanted to meet me. Before he could answer, one of his colleagues stood up and went out to the balcony to see “if there is no better place for us to sit.” Within seconds he returned and declared that the place we were seated at was better than being out on the balcony. As he returned to his seat the cadre who had asked to meet me began to respond to my earlier enquiry.

“Comrade Dragon I wanted to see you because we have finished our training and we don’t want to go back to Lusaka, but to Maputo,” the young man began to explain.

“But you have a representative in Maputo, why didn’t you communicate your wishes to him?” I interjected.

“For the simple reason that we no longer want to belong to ZAPU, we want to join ZANU. It is for this reason that we considered it proper to see you here instead of at your house. We feared that if our Representative got wind of our meeting with you he might suspect the motive,” the cadre concluded.

My sixth sense reported something was not quite right, but I could not put a finger on it. There were inconsistencies in his story. Now he was referring to ‘we’ and yet when he phoned he had only been talking about ‘I’. Secondly, his reason for meeting me at the Rendezvous had been because he was finishing lessons late and our house was rather too far away. Now the story was different. They did not want to meet me at our house for fear their Representative might find out and suspect the motive. Wherever the truth lay, something was just not right.

“I am not mandated to accept or reject a request such as you have presented to me. The decision can only be taken at the higher echelons of our Party. Fortunately, tomorrow I am scheduled to fly to Maputo and I will take the opportunity to present your case to our leadership. Whatever their response I will communicate it to you when I return,” I responded to the petitioning by the ZAPU cadre.

Just then a large group of ZAPU cadres entered the restaurant. “Finish,” was the only word that came from my lips. All of a sudden everything began falling into place. I had been set up for assassination. The ZAPU cadre who went to the balcony to see if there was a better place to sit was in fact giving a signal to the others that their prey was in the net.

I watched about thirteen ZAPU cadres advancing towards our table leaving five others at the only entrance/exit. Outwardly I remained calm and composed, but inside my mind was in turmoil. I knew as I looked at the determined expressions of the ZAPU cadres that I was minutes, if not seconds, away from death.

The ZAPU cadres formed a horseshoe around Comrade Choto and me, trapping us between the wall behind us and the cordon they had formed and reinforced by the three cadres who had come earlier on.

“Dragon, what are you doing here?” their commander asked wearing a very serious expression. He was huge, hefty and intimidating.

“Why do you ask me such a question in a public place?” I responded calmly.

“Dragon, I said what are you doing here?” Patrick repeated the question as if he had not heard my response. I gave the same response. For the third time he repeated the same question and I was going to give exactly the same answer when his hand swiftly went to the inside pocket of the jacket he was wearing and came out with a knife. Simultaneously his colleagues did the same and came out with an assortment of knives and screwdrivers.

Without even thinking I pushed the table that separated us towards them. Many lost their balance and in the ensuing confusion I went under the table and through their legs, and dashed for the exit. The five cadres who had been left at the exit had been watching events as they unfolded and had their weapons ready in their hands lest I should attempt to escape. I got to them faster than they had anticipated and broke through the human barrier they had formed at the exit. I began descending the stairs when I felt the first stab in my back. As I continued running down the stairs a few more knives and screwdrivers found their mark there. I was taking three, four steps at once, and by the time I reached the ground floor I had created a small gap between my assailants and me.

Our car was still parked where I had left it. To attempt to take it would have been suicidal, as I would have been killed before even unlocking the car doors. I ran along the pavement that was parallel to the main road leading to the city center. Ahead of me the traffic lights facing the direction I was coming from turned amber and in a second or two they would turn red. A middle aged white lady driving a Lada was slowing down in preparation to stop at the traffic lights. I went for the rear door of her car and fortunately it was not locked. While still in motion I jumped into the rear of the car and locked the door. The white lady panicked at the sudden intrusion and wanted to stop the car and flee.

“Drive!” I barked out the order “can’t you see the blood oozing from my back and the people trying to kill me?” At that precise moment my assailants reached the car and tried unsuccessfully to wrench open the back door. The white lady was galvanized into action. There were cars in front of her that had stopped. She swerved her car on to the pavement and beat the red traffic lights. My assailants watched frustratedly as their prey got away.

Despite protestations that she did not have sufficient fuel, I ordered the woman to drive to Arat Kilo (meaning four kilometres in the Amharic language). As I got out of her car I gave her the fifty American dollars I had withdrawn for use as allowances for my trip to Maputo the following day.

At Arat Kilo I rushed up the stairs to the flat where Mr Murerwa's family lived. Mrs Murerwa and her children were at home. Tapiwa, the youngest daughter, shouted "Uncle Dragon" in welcome, then saw my shirt drenched in blood and ran away from me in panic. Until the end of my mission to Ethiopia in 1980, Tapiwa was traumatised and never wanted to come near Uncle Dragon again. Being a nurse by profession, Mrs Murerwa was able to stop the bleeding and administer first aid before calling the police, who then drove me to hospital.

Comrade Choto, who had watched helplessly as the attempt to assassinate me was unfolding, became the unintended victim after I managed to escape. He got two stab wounds to the head and two others to the body before Ethiopian soldiers fired shots in the air and apprehended all the ZAPU cadres involved.

After independence Air Zimbabwe employed most of these ZAPU cadres as maintenance technicians. I made it clear to them that I bore no malice against any one of them because they had no personal hatred of me but were doing the bidding of their Party. Had I been given a similar mission by my Party then, most probably, I would have carried out its bidding too.

One of the memorable moments of my stay in Ethiopia was when I met the reggae king, Bob Marley. I briefed him in greater depth about our struggle in Zimbabwe. By the time I left his hotel he had promised to finance our operations in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, he must have communicated his intentions to officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some of whom were avid sympathisers of ZAPU. He was told that if he wanted to fund ZANU's operations, he would have to fund ZAPU's operations to the same level. In the end he decided he would contribute to our struggle through our Headquarters in Maputo.

I remained in Ethiopia until 11 April, 1980, just a week before our independence.

* The Ethiopian government used the title 'Chairman' instead of 'President' or 'Prime Minister' for its Head of State.

Chapter 10

THE ELUSIVE UNITY

There were many twists and turns in the unity saga between ZANU and ZAPU. Amidst the many pretensions at a united front, unity between the two organisations and their respective military wings – ZANLA and ZIPRA – remained as elusive as quicksilver for the entire period of the armed liberation struggle. Neither ZANU nor ZAPU was truly engaged in the unity mode.

Both parties had dug deep and impassable trenches around two divergent positions. The strategic interests of ZAPU were anchored upon the position that fusion of the political parties must precede fusion of the respective military wings. The opposing strategic interests of ZANU emphasised the need to fuse the fighting forces first, and leave the issue of political leadership to be decided by the people once liberation was achieved. It thus became the proverbial riddle of what came first, the egg or the chicken.

Ever since the split within ZAPU that led to the formation of ZANU on 8th August 1963, the two parties consistently maintained an antagonistic and irreconcilable attitude towards each other. At the time of the split, I was aged 12 and too young to fully comprehend the internal contradictions within ZAPU that precipitated the split. But even then, one could not escape the awesome presence or popularity of the man of the moment in nationalist politics, Joshua Nkomo. He, alongside his lieutenants, notably James Chikerema and George Nyandoro, had become iconic figures to be venerated in speeches, slogans and songs. Dr Nkomo had an impressive political resumé, rich in demonstrable experience in leadership positions. He was President of the African National Council (ANC) from 1957 until it was banned in 1959; President of the National Democratic Party (NDP) from 1960 until its banning in 1961; President of ZAPU from 1961 until it too was banned in 1962. Despite its outlawing in Rhodesia, ZAPU continued its existence as a party in exile with Dr Nkomo as its President. Comrade Nkomo got the recognition at home and abroad of being the father

figure of Zimbabwean politics, and was affectionately referred to as ‘Father Zimbabwe’. It was this aura of reverence, ZAPU hoped, that would stand Dr Joshua Nkomo in good stead in a leadership contest if ZANU and ZAPU were to merge into a single party.

On the other hand, Comrade Mugabe, the eloquent and fiery speaker, by comparison held junior positions in both ZAPU and ZANU (after the split). To those who associated with him closely, it was evident that he was a man of rare intelligence, unwavering principles and unparallelled determination. Once he had embraced the principle of armed struggle, alongside other ZANU cadres, it became a commitment from which he could not be shaken. When Ndabaningi Sithole, the first President of ZANU, demonstrated a lack of total commitment to the execution of the armed struggle, the fighting forces (ZANLA) did not hesitate to disown him and quickly and unanimously chose Comrade Mugabe as his interim successor, pending ratification at the next Party Congress. In terms of the party’s hierarchical structure, his appointment made a lot of sense. The President (Ndabaningi Sithole) had been disowned, the Vice President (Comrade Takawira) had died in prison, and the next in the succession pyramid was the Secretary General, a post that Comrade Mugabe occupied. Never before had Comrade Mugabe taken the mantle of president of a political party.

True to expectations, Comrade Mugabe’s unflinching resolve to execute the armed struggle as the only instrument to achieve genuine freedom and independence, won him greater respect amongst ZANLA forces and propelled the struggle to phenomenal heights.

From the ZANU/ZANLA perspective, the biggest obstacle to unity was ZAPU’s reluctance to commit its forces to the battlefield, despite the fact that ZIPRA, armed with tanks, multiple rocket launchers, missiles, etc., was better equipped than ZANLA. Since this array of advanced weaponry was not being employed to engage the enemy, the belief within ZANU was that ZAPU was committed to what we defined as ‘The Zero Strategy’. By this we meant that ZAPU wanted to leave the fighting to ZANU, but when military victory was in sight, they would deploy their fresh and heavily armed forces into the capital and declare the formation of a new government.

The inactivity of the ZIPRA forces was forcefully brought home by Comrade Mugabe in his letter of 27 August 1978 to Colonel Mengishtu Haile Mariam,* in which he stated, ‘Who, dear brother, does not know that

without ZANU there would be no war in Zimbabwe, none whatsoever? Who dear brother, does not know that ZANU single-handedly has borne the brunt of our liberation struggle? We alone have, therefore, made meaningful sacrifices. Yet, it is because of our preparedness to sacrifice that we have destroyed the base of colonialist power in Zimbabwe and laid a base for people's power. The enemy is now facing sure defeat because we of ZANU have never sagged in our morale nor wavered in our courage and revolutionary commitment. At no time have we ever allowed opportunism to neutralise our principles, or connived and plotted with the enemy. We deserve, so we sincerely believe, the total support of all our revolutionary brothers in Africa, and more so of revolutionary Ethiopia.'

Because of ZANU's uncontested dominance of the war front, any unity of the fighting forces would tend to favour ZANU and its President, Comrade Mugabe. ZANLA forces were engaged in an unprecedented political and mobilisation programme of the masses in its operational areas in order to guarantee that any political choices in future would favour President Mugabe and his party.

The message amongst ZANLA forces was unambiguously clear – unity was a tactical inconvenience that should be left to the political leadership to handle. In the words of the late Chief of Defence for ZANU, Comrade Josiah Magama Tongogara, 'if your gun is provided by ZANU, you move the ZANU way and you talk the ZANU way. There is no Patriotic Front.' Both ZAPU and ZANU knew that unity was an illusion, a mirage only visible to expectant external supporters. When our audience was the Frontline States or the OAU we would sing songs glorifying our 'unity', but in our camps we would express outright condemnation of unity with ZAPU. ZAPU also harboured the same sentiments, as evidenced by their attempt to assassinate me.

There were many unsuccessful attempts aimed at achieving unity between ZANU and ZAPU or their military wings, ZANLA and ZIPRA. In the majority of these cases, the half-hearted attempts at unity were in response to external pressures, especially from the Frontline States that provided the essential staging ground for guerrilla operations against the colonial regime in Rhodesia.

On the political side, the unity that was more enduring was that of the Patriotic Front. The Patriotic Front (PF) was created in Maputo in 1976, the fruition of negotiations begun by Comrade Mugabe of ZANU and Comrade

Jason Moyo of ZAPU in early October 1976. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) recognised the Patriotic Front as the sole and legitimate representative of the Zimbabwean people at its annual summit of Heads of State held in Gabon in July 1977. This development was of paramount significance because it meant that only the Patriotic Front became the recognised political voice of the people of Zimbabwe. In the eyes of the OAU or any other international forum, neither ZANU nor ZAPU, in their unitary form, had the legitimacy to negotiate for transfer of political power outside the ambit of the Patriotic Front. Thus, starting with the Geneva Conference held from 28 October, 1976, and all subsequent conferences up to independence in 1980, the Patriotic Front became the sole and legitimate mouthpiece of the fighting forces.

For ZANU, this was a requisite provision to rein in Dr Nkomo who had shown a propensity to cut clandestine deals with the Smith regime. There had been talk of secret diplomatic contacts involving, among others, Dr Joshua Nkomo, Dr Kaunda of Zambia, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith, and South African President Vorster. One of ZANU's concerns had always been the possibility of ZAPU independently reaching an accord with the Rhodesian government. If such accord brought Dr Nkomo into power, the possibility was that such government could be recognized by the OAU, thereby dealing a serious blow to the continuation of the struggle. The basic parameters guiding the Patriotic Front were that no party could pursue negotiations for power transfer independent of the other and that the armed struggle we were waging was, ultimately, against British colonialism and not its extension, the Smith regime. The Patriotic Front was vindicated when, after the Lancaster House Conference, the British government agreed to assume their colonial responsibility and to exorcise the colonial demon through supervision of a transitional process that brought to power the first black government elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

As for ZAPU, they saw the formation of the Patriotic Front as a transitional stage towards a unified party in which, because of seniority, Dr Nkomo would emerge the undisputed leader. Throughout the struggle, ZAPU never gave up the desire for ZANU and ZAPU to merge into one party. Even at the eleventh hour, after the Lancaster House Conference had ended, ZAPU had wanted the two parties to contest the elections as a single party.

Another spoiler in the unity saga was Bishop Abel Tondekai Muzorewa, leader of the ANC which later became the United African National Council (UANC). The ANC under Bishop Abel Muzorewa was formed in 1971 by the banned parties, primarily to mobilise people against a British government deal with Ian Smith, purportedly for a transition to majority rule in exchange for an end to sanctions imposed after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Smith in 1965. Under the acronym NIBMAR (no independence before majority African rule) Muzorewa successfully campaigned for the rejection of the deal.

Buoyed up by the successful campaign against the British/Rhodesian proposals, Muzorewa saw the opportunity to transform the ANC into a political party, independent from ZANU or ZAPU, but claiming to have influence and control over their fighting forces. He almost managed to convince some leaders about his legitimacy as leader of the fighting forces, but was discredited by the very forces he claimed to lead. In connivance with the British and Rhodesians, Muzorewa unsuccessfully tried to entice Dr Joshua Nkomo to join forces with him, to the exclusion of the man they regarded as the communist ogre, Comrade Robert Mugabe.

The Rhodesians allowed the ANC to operate in the country and even attempted to elevate Muzorewa's political status as they saw in him and his non-violence rhetoric, a lesser evil when compared to the radical communist oriented ZANU and ZAPU. His final humiliation came at the polls leading to the formation of the first democratically elected government in Zimbabwe. Muzorewa contested the elections as Prime Minister of what had become known as Zimbabwe Rhodesia and only managed to win three seats out of the 80 reserved for blacks, with the rest being split between ZANU (57) and ZAPU (20).

On the military front, the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA), formed in 1976, was the closest ZANU and ZAPU ever got to a workable military alliance. It must be remembered that at the time ZIPA was formed, most of the ZANU leadership was imprisoned, either in Zambia or in Rhodesia. The immediate period preceding its formation had seen concerted attempts involving Rhodesians, South Africans, Zambians, the British and Americans, trying to broker an agreement between ZAPU and the Smith regime. As it became clear that these clandestine manoeuvres that nearly paralysed the struggle and ushered in a period of uncertainty that we referred to as the 'détente exercise', were doomed to failure, the key

members of the Frontline States, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, began insisting that their continued support for the guerrilla struggle against the Smith regime would be conditional upon ZANLA and ZIPRA agreeing to amalgamate their forces.

For ZANLA this was a welcome development since it tallied with its philosophy of uniting the fighting forces for the common cause of liberation, and leaving the issue of political leadership to the masses in Zimbabwe after liberation. Moreover, ZANLA had a tactical advantage in that its forces were operating in many areas in Rhodesia. For this reason, if ZIPRA were to fight side by side with ZANLA, their forces would come under the command of ZANLA operational commanders. It is precisely for this reason that ZANLA commanders occupied the most senior positions in ZIPA. (See the ZIPA leadership structure in the appendices.).

Due to a deep mistrust of each other, ZIPA had a short lifespan, but its impact was phenomenal. ZIPRA cadres who had come to join ZANLA cadres in Mozambique began fearing that they would be killed in operations inside Rhodesia if their forces teamed up with ZANLA forces. Many ZIPRA forces that had deployed at the home front, and those at the rear bases in Mozambique awaiting deployment, began fleeing back to Zambia.

Even though ZIPA did not last, its greatest achievement was to garner more support for the struggle and secure the release of ZANLA commanders in Zambian prisons. ZANLA took full advantage of the lifting by the Frontline States of restrictions they had imposed on the training and arming of guerrilla fighters, to advance the struggle. The war effort intensified during this period as a deluge of recruits crossed the now porous border with Mozambique (after Mozambique's attainment of independence) to join the ranks of guerrilla fighters.

Although for the ordinary cadres, ZIPA was yet another tactical merger, it would seem the ZANLA component in the ZIPA leadership actually wanted it to succeed. The successes and broadening of the armed struggle under their youthful leadership brought new problems. Most of the young commanders saw the opportunity of dethroning the old guard that was released from Zambian jails, and in whose name and for whose release we had stepped up the armed struggle.

This turn of events led to the purging of the ZIPA leadership and their sympathisers by the old guard and their detention in Mozambique and release after independence. Comrade Rex Nhongo was not affected, even

though he was the senior ZIPA commander, because he sided with the party leadership.

* Copy of the letter is in the author's possession.

Chapter 11

CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF ZIMBABWE

By dint of good fortune I came to London, a place where an international conference to try and resolve the political impasse between the Patriotic Front and the Rhodesian regime, a proxy of the British, was underway. I was not an official delegate to the conference and nor was my coming to London for the purpose of attending the Lancaster House Conference.

Mr Chenga, one of our cadres undergoing pilot training at Ethiopian Airlines, was afflicted by a strange illness that baffled the medical professionals in Ethiopia. Two weeks had passed since he first became ill and his condition was worsening. Every part of his body seemed to be aching. The doctors could not pinpoint the source or cause of his illness and why it failed to respond to treatment or pain killers. On close cross examination we learned that he had been afflicted by a similar illness about a decade ago when he was living in the UK. After numerous fruitless efforts to treat the disease, at big and prestigious hospitals and clinics, he finally found a solution to his illness at a small private clinic in London.

I obtained authority from our Headquarters in Maputo to take Chenga to the same private clinic in London that had previously successfully treated his strange disease. While in London I linked up with our leadership attending the Lancaster House Conference and attended most of the open sessions of the negotiations during the last two weeks of the historic conference.

The Patriotic Front was in a combative mode, determined to frustrate any outcome that would seem to compromise the gains of the struggle. We were convinced, especially the ZANU component of the Patriotic Front, that we were poised for a military victory. Any talks, such as the ones we were engaged in, were an unwelcome distraction from our focus on achieving victory on the battlefield. We were ready to confront and reject machinations aimed at reversing and sacrificing the gains of our struggle.

We had successfully done so at Geneva, at Malta, and this time round at Lancaster would be no exception.

Judging by the frequency with which the conference deliberations stalled, I was fairly confident that it was only a matter of days before it came to a complete deadlock and it would be, once again, time to go back to the bush. We never trusted the Conservative government, especially the current one led by Margaret Thatcher. If there had been a Labour government in power, we thought, maybe the conference would stand a slight chance of succeeding. That had been the firm belief amongst the guerrilla fighters.

We woke up one day prepared for more of the meaningless and time wasting routine. One could almost accurately predict what posture the Rhodesian regime or the Patriotic Front would adopt at the conference. Even the reaction and frustration of the chairman, the no-nonsense Lord Carrington, could also be predicted. Many among us were beginning to wonder why the chairman could not muster the courage to declare the conference, that was doomed to failure from day one, had ended without agreement.

On this day we were going to have another ordinary working session. I liked to be in the conference hall at least 15 to 20 minutes before the time scheduled to begin the proceedings. Some of our senior commanders, particularly Comrade Tongogara, would arrive about ten minutes ahead of time and mingle with our adversaries. I had on a number of occasions moved closer to Comrade Tongogara when he was having light-hearted conversations with Mr Ian Douglas Smith or other members of his delegation. It was quite evident from the expressions on the faces of our foes that they had a great respect for Comrade Tongogara's intelligent conversations. His reasoned contributions and timely interjections in any conversations gained him the respect of everyone, friend and foe alike, who had the honour to engage in conversation with him.

As usual I got into the conference hall about 20 minutes ahead of time. The commencement time drew closer, but only a handful of delegates to the conference had arrived. Ten minutes to starting time, and Comrade Tongogara had not turned up. I wondered whether the commencement time for today had been changed. At the commencement time, an announcement on behalf of the chairman was made to the effect that the ordinary session

had been cancelled and instead, the heads of the Patriotic Front delegation were going to have a closed session with the leaders of the Frontline States.

Consultations between the Patriotic Front and the Presidents of the Frontline States had, on very few occasions, taken place in order to harmonise negotiating positions. These were normally slotted into the conference programme and participants notified in good time. Alternatively, Frontline leaders would privately and surreptitiously request an impromptu ‘get-together’ with Patriotic Front leaders, without affecting the conference programme and without seeking first the consent of the conference chairperson.

This time round, the consultation was affecting the pre-set conference programme and was convened with the knowledge of the chairperson. In my thinking, reason must finally have prevailed and the chairperson had recognised that the conference had reached a dead end and it was now time to call it quits.

That was the expected outcome from the ZANU wing of the Patriotic Front and every one of us was waiting in anticipation for confirmation of that position.

I took advantage of the interruption in the day’s programme to do a little shopping in London. Expecting that an afternoon session would be convened, I was back at Lancaster House by 12.30 pm. If any announcement of change of programme was going to come, I expected it during the lunch hour.

As I entered the lounge to one of the houses allocated for use by the Patriotic Front, I observed Comrade Tongogara seated alone on a couch, with the left side of his face resting in the palm of his left hand, in a cogitative mood. I quietly took a Polaroid camera I had bought that morning, loaded a cartridge into it and stealthily moved closer to Comrade Tongogara. I was two steps away from him without drawing his attention. I lifted my camera to my face and had him in my sights like a marksman preparing to take out his target.

“Comrade Tongo,” I called out his name. His head disengaged itself from the palm of his hand, jerked upwards and his eyes opened wide. I clicked my camera at that precise moment. I had broken Comrade Tongo’s concentration and focussed his attention on the picture that was developing in my hand. Within a minute it was fully developed. Comrade Tongogara

looked at his photograph with great fascination. It was the very best picture of him that I had ever seen.

“Can I keep this picture?” Comrade Tongogara asked. I could not deny my idol his wish. I parted with the picture but if I knew today who has it I would be willing to offer a huge amount of money to buy it back.

“You seemed so far away in your thoughts when I came in, what were you thinking about Comrade Tongo?” My innocent inquiry of genuine concern for someone I admired had an unintended consequence. A dark cloud seemed to sweep across Comrade Tongo’s face and the melancholy that my picture had succeeded in driving off, again settled on his features. This was very uncharacteristic of Comrade Tongogara. The Tongo I knew never buckled when confronted by any adversity, but instead grew in strength and determination. The Tongo I witnessed now looked worn out and defeated.

For a while Comrade Tongogara did not respond to my enquiry. Surely, he must have received news of a bad personal tragedy, I tried to convince myself. When he finally opened his mouth to respond, his words were slow, measured and almost indistinct.

“W-e a-r-e g-o-i-n-g t-o s-e-l-l o-u-r s-t-r-u-g-g-l-e.”

“What?” I asked incredulously, my mind refusing to accept that I had heard correctly.

“I said,” Comrade Tongogara was more composed, “we are being asked to compromise our struggle.”

“Who by, is it the British?” I enquired, unable to comprehend why this should bother our Chief of Defence since we always knew that the British were bent on negating the gains of our struggle.

“No, of course not, I don’t care a hoot about the British” Comrade Tongogara responded dismissively with a wave of the hand. “By the Frontline Presidents.”

This was a new and unanticipated twist in the equation of our relationship with the Frontline States. Up to now the Patriotic Front and the Frontline Leaders had clung hand in glove to each other in their insistence that unless the Patriotic Front demands were met, there would be an intensification of the armed struggle. How could this position have changed? Since the meeting between the Patriotic Front and Frontline leaders was a scheduled meeting with the blessing of the chairperson, what was the hand of the British in all this?

“What exactly was the demand of the Frontline leaders that would make you feel so despondent?” I pressed Comrade Tongogara to reveal more about what had transpired in their meeting with the Frontline leaders.

“They have categorically stated that we must reach an agreement without fail because they no longer have the capacity to provide sanctuary and forward bases to our forces.” My heart sank.

When I joined the struggle in early 1975, ZANLA had just entered a difficult phase in which the Frontline States were withholding assistance and forward bases, as a means of arm-twisting ZANU to engage in negotiations with the Rhodesian regime and also to coerce ZANU and ZAPU to agree to unite their forces and their political parties. We referred to this as the ‘détente exercise’ period. Be that as it may, we were able to get through that difficult phase, thanks especially to the visionary leadership of Presidents Samora Machel and Julius Nyerere. To me, whatever demands were made by the Frontline States, all that was needed was time, tact and patience for us to overcome this unforeseen and latest difficulty in our struggle.

“But surely Comrade Tongogara taking into account the progress we have achieved on the battlefield, President Samora Machel cannot be a party to suggestions that would halt the progress of our struggle at this critical juncture,” this was more a statement of fact than a question.

“To the contrary,” Comrade Tongogara affirmed, “it was President Machel who eloquently and unequivocally stated that we had to reach an agreement at all costs since the burden of supporting the armed struggle had become insupportable for the Frontline States, especially Mozambique and Zambia.” The enormity of what Comrade Tongo had said was hard to stomach and I was left speechless. When I finally regained my composure, the sentiment I expressed closely resembled what Comrade Tongogara had said. “Without a doubt our struggle is being sacrificed at the altar of expediency.”

Later, as I mingled with other members of the Patriotic Front delegation, it was evident that the atmosphere within our camp was gloomy and subdued. Our negotiating team was busy strategising on what could be salvaged under the prevailing circumstances. The main sticking point had been the question of land. The Patriotic Front held the view that its position on the emotive issue of the re-distribution of land be held sacrosanct and that any agreement should categorically state who was to take responsibility

for compensating those dispossessed of their land by the white settler minority.

When the conference later convened, the Patriotic Front insisted that it wanted the question of the land to be addressed conclusively. An important breakthrough was achieved when the British government, in conjunction with the American government, in a private consultation hosted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, agreed to take responsibility for compensation of all land that a future government of Zimbabwe would repossess for purposes of redistribution to the landless.

Not everything went our way. Our adversaries insisted that for ten years from the attainment of independence land could only be acquired on the basis of ‘willing buyer, willing seller.’ During this ten year period, there were not to be constitutional provisions or amendments to affect that position. Reluctantly, we were forced to accept a condition we were strongly opposed to.

Another sticking point was the issue of security forces that would have the responsibility of maintaining law and order during the transitional stage. We wanted the Patriotic Front forces to constitute the legal force during the period of transition. This proposal was vehemently opposed and rejected. In the end we settled for the unfavourable option that our forces be confined to some assembly points.

As the conference wound down and we were preparing to go back, I teased Comrade Tongogara about what we were going to do now that we had signed the seal of ‘betrayal’ of our struggle. The quick witted ZANLA commander exhibited the courage and confidence that was the hall mark of his character.

“If we tell our forces that we are going home in a white plane with a red cross, anyone who shoots at that plane *tina yazibopa* (we will arrest),” the ZANLA strategist responded.

In reply to Comrade Tongogara’s remark, I quipped, “how can you arrest the culprits when your plane is brought down and you probably don’t survive the crash?” When I reflect in retrospect, Comrade Tongogara had prophesied his death. It was inconceivable for a guerrilla commander to fly back home to implement the provisions of a ceasefire in a plane with Red Cross signs.

As a measure of respect and acceptance of his unique intellectual capabilities, Comrade Tongogara began to be referred to by the highest

military title of ‘General’ by friends and foes alike, during the latter part of the Lancaster House Conference.

Before returning to my station in Addis Ababa, I asked General Tongogara for the honour of accompanying him to Rhodesia when the time for his triumphant return came. To my delight, he ordered me to go and pack my things in Addis Ababa and await instructions to fly to Mozambique to join him when the time came.

Before the ink was dry, news of the successful conclusion of the Lancaster House Conference had been splashed all around the world. There were mixed reactions to the news.

The majority of black Zimbabweans were jubilant that success at the Lancaster House Conference would finally signal an end to the brutality they had to endure under the minority regime of Ian Douglas Smith and the expected return of their children from the bush. For some families, jubilation was tempered with anxiety as to whether their children had survived the brutal and arduous struggle.

Most of the minority white community was relieved that they no longer would have to be called up into the army reserves, or for national service, to continue the bush war. There were yet others who feared losing the lavish lifestyles reserved for people of their colour if the ‘communist’ Mugabe should come to power.

There was great relief within the political establishment in Britain. The unimaginable had been achieved. Not only was it achieved, but achieved under the watch of a British Conservative government. Until now, only a Labour government could have been given the slimmest of chances to broker an agreement in which the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe was a negotiating partner. Their only hope and prayer was that the settlement would not unravel at the implementation stage. No doubt, the successful conclusion of the Lancaster House Conference had elevated the status of the Conservative government under the premiership of the ‘Iron Lady’, Margaret Thatcher, and her appointed ‘no-nonsense’ chairman, Lord Carrington.

There was also much at stake for the Frontline States. They had pulled off a gamble whose ultimate success depended upon a number of unpredictable circumstances. On the one hand was the Patriotic Front with its deep-seated mistrust of both the British and Rhodesian regimes. To compound it all, the Patriotic Front felt betrayed by those in whom they had

reposed great trust and confidence – the Frontline States themselves. On the other hand were the British and their extension, the Rhodesian Front. It was against British colonialism that the revolutionary armed struggle was being waged. Through their proxy, the minority white settler regime, their economic plunder of Rhodesia and the continued denial of a political voice to the black majority was maintained and enforced. How could those with a history of colonial subjugation be trusted to be honest brokers, and how could a regime whose leader was sworn not to see a black government in his lifetime or in a thousand years (whichever came last) be trusted to police a process to bring about that he was sworn to oppose. It was not only the British and Rhodesians who could derail the implementation of the Lancaster House Agreement. The Patriotic Front forces could also impede its implementation by simply continuing to intensify the armed struggle. True, the Frontline States could deny the Patriotic Front use of their territories as launching pads for attacks against the Rhodesian regime. However, in the case of ZANLA, they had created liberated zones in large parts of Rhodesia from where they could sustain their war effort independent of Frontline States support and assistance.

Indeed, the credibility of the Frontline States was at stake. So also was the credibility of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) whose policy positions towards Southern Africa and support for the wars of liberation in that region through its Liberation Committee, were shaped by recommendations from the Frontline States.

The news of the Agreement was received with suspicion by ZANLA. News broadcasts were not the accepted mode of communicating decisions amongst our forces. In the past, broadcasts were used to mislead our fighting forces. When Muzorewa, Sithole, and Chirau concluded a sell-out agreement with the Smith regime, they broadcast falsehoods to our forces that the war was over and they should lay down their arms. Learning from these experiences, we began stressing in our orientation that never should our forces receive instructions through radio or television broadcasts, or through print media, or any electronic means. We had our tried and effective means of communicating instructions to our operational forces. Even if through these methods it took a little longer to disseminate instructions, they were the most reliable and only acceptable means at our disposal. Any appeals through unrecognised channels were to be reacted to by intensifying the armed struggle.

The period immediately following the news of an agreement witnessed an unprecedented increase in reinforcements and other combat activities by our forces. To our enemies, these developments were deemed an ominous sign that our forces had disowned the agreement negotiated by their leaders. Nothing could have been further away from the truth.

After returning to Mozambique at the conclusion of the Lancaster House Conference, Comrade Tongogara began making detailed plans of how ZANLA forces would proceed to implement the provisions of the Agreement. These included ceasefire orders and the method of disseminating these to our forces still outside Rhodesia, the majority of them in Mozambique, as well as to those who were at the battlefield in Rhodesia.

Regarding those who were still in Mozambique awaiting deployment, the orders would detail when and how they would travel to Rhodesia. According to the Lancaster Agreement, all our forces were to go to predetermined Assembly Points dotted around various parts of Rhodesia. In the detailed implementation plans Comrade Tongogara was drawing, our forces would not be put in one basket and left to the mercy of the Rhodesian regime. When our forces returned to Rhodesia, significant numbers were to remain outside the Assembly Points in secret locations and armed to the hilt in case we were betrayed and had to resume the fight.

As for the comrades deployed in Rhodesia the priority, according to Comrade Tongo, was to communicate to them the outcome of the just concluded Lancaster House Conference, and how this would impact on the operations of ZANLA at the home front as well as the rear bases. Comrade Tongogara had ordered that commanders from all our operational sectors, or their emissaries, should come to the ZANLA Headquarters in Chimoio to be briefed on the way forward. His strategy was to ensure that all precautionary measures were taken to avoid turning our forces into cannon fodder for the Rhodesian soldiers. With that in mind, all our most experienced fighters were to stay out of the Assembly Points and remain in a state of combat readiness in secret locations. Lest the diminished numbers of our fighters in Assembly Points should raise suspicion, their numbers were to be bolstered by the *mujibhas* and *zvimbidos*, especially those who had received some training in guerrilla tactics in the liberated areas.

Like the strategist that he was, Comrade Tongogara had mapped out how ZANLA was to implement the provisions of the Lancaster House

Agreement, right down to the minutest detail. All that remained to be done was to explain to, and win the approval of, the Commander-in-Chief of ZANLA and President of ZANU, Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe, before the strategy could be implemented.

After leaving London at the conclusion of the Lancaster House Conference, I flew back to Addis Ababa excited at the prospect of joining Comrade Tongogara in the not too distant future, for the triumphant return to Rhodesia. My staff, who had heard the news of the successful conclusion of the Lancaster House Conference over the radio, had expectantly awaited my return in order to get the finer details of the Agreement and how its provisions were to be implemented. They too, were anxious to know when they would be expected to return to Rhodesia.

I felt embarrassed that when I pleaded with Comrade Tongogara to let me accompany him when returning to Rhodesia, I had not thought of making a case for my officers too. The egocentricity that I believed years of struggle and intense politicisation, as well as our daily interactions as comrades, had succeeded in eliminating had merely hibernated and now on the eve of our freedom and independence was rearing its ugly head. I was forced into a nonessential lie, that in fact it was Comrade Tongogara who had initiated the offer to have me accompany him. However, I honestly assured my comrades that I would make an appeal on their behalf to our Headquarters in Maputo to expedite their return to Rhodesia too.

About three weeks after the Lancaster Agreement I was beginning to wonder whether Comrade Tongogara had forgotten his promise to me and had already gone to Rhodesia leaving me behind. I shot down the notion as soon as it got into my head. Comrade Tongogara was not a personality who could return to Rhodesia without attracting a lot of fanfare. If he had returned, the news media would be awash with details of his return and quotes of his every interview. Besides, Comrade Tongogara was a man of his word and I was absolutely confident he would fulfil his promise. It took me less than a week after my return from London to be ready to move at short notice. For now, I simply had to be patient.

Convinced that he had planned even for the worst case scenario, Comrade Tongogara arranged an audience with Comrade President Robert Mugabe to brief him of his plans and to bid him farewell before beginning the practical implementation of the provisions of the Lancaster House Agreement.

Before leaving Maputo, Comrade Tongogara also bade farewell to President Samora Moises Machel and senior members of his government. According to one senior FRELIMO official, as he was leaving President Samora's office he suddenly paused and said to President Samora, "I want you to know I did not kill Comrade Herbert Chitepo." Those were his parting words.

Comrade Tongogara's entourage included Comrade Josiah Tungamirai; a member of Central Committee and National Political Commissar for ZANU, and Comrade Chamu Zvipangei:^{*} who was a private secretary to Comrade Tongogara and who after independence held a number of senior party and government positions.

Driving in two new Land Rovers supplied by the British and donated through Tanzania, they set out on their journey to Chimoio – about 1,100 kilometres from Maputo.

My patience was running thin but my faith remained unshaken. Five years after leaving Rhodesia, I wondered how it would feel to return a hero, rubbing shoulders with an even greater hero and personal idol – General Josiah Magama Tongogara. I could imagine the commotion at the airport as both national and international journalists were sure to jostle to gain a better position from which to capture the image of the man of the moment – the ZANLA strategist and grand enigma, General Tongogara. Every available opportunity to capture Comrade Tongogara's arrival and later activities on DVD would be grasped; legions of supporters would make an effort to record on tape every interview, every speech and every word emitted from Comrade Tongogara's mouth. And, the most prized achievement would be to appear in the same photo with Comrade Tongogara. Adept youths would waste no time imitating the mannerisms of their revolutionary hero – the gnashing and swishing of teeth; the halting, emphatic and appealing repetitious style of speaking combining different languages; (Shona, Swahili, Nyanja, English) to express a single theme, for special effects. A typical address by Comrade Tongogara would translate to something like this:

"It is difficult in the history of Zimbabwe to find a leader with the interest of the people at heart like Comrade President Robert Gabriel Mugabe. Also, it is difficult to find a leader committed to supporting the Zimbabwean struggle like Comrade President Samora Machel.

“History will have it on record that it was difficult to have a leader committed to the people like Comrade Mugabe and equally difficult to find a leader committed to supporting our struggle like Comrade Samora Machel.” Such an address would be delivered in an emphatic and measured tone, while at the same time the all-encompassing, penetrating gaze would ensure the audience was kept captivated and very attentive. To guarantee attentiveness, Comrade Tongogara would break into singing:

<i>Ndiro gidi vakomana,</i>	It is the gun comrades
<i>Richatonga Zimbabwe,</i>	That shall rule Zimbabwe
<i>Richatonga nyika yedu</i>	It shall rule our country
<i>Nyika yedu yeZimbabwe</i>	Our country Zimbabwe
<i>Tinotenda vaMugabe,</i>	We thank Comrade Mugabe
<i>VaMugabe navaSamora,</i>	Comrade Mugabe and Comrade Samora
<i>Vakatsigira hondo yedu,</i>	They are the anchor of our struggle
<i>Hondo yedu yeZimbabwe.</i>	The struggle for Zimbabwe

At the end of the song Comrade Tongogara would continue with his address to a motivated and captivated audience.

“I have told you, it is difficult to find a leader with the interest of the people at heart like Comrade President Mugabe, and difficult too to find a supporter of our struggle like President Julius Nyerere. Do you hear me? Do you understand?”

At the end of the address, everyone would be expressing bewilderment at Comrade Tongogara’s skill at powerfully delivering his message. A repetition of a simple short worded message would leave every one contented and wishing the address had continued a little longer.

During the first two weeks in Zimbabwe the Tongogara spell would grip the whole nation. In the midst of all the grandeur and pomp of this auspicious occasion, marking the beginning of the successful conclusion of our liberation struggle, all the other accompanying heroes would be overshadowed and rendered almost insignificant.

I visualised myself as one of those insignificant heroes when the occasion finally came. That it would come was beyond question for I had absolute

faith that my revolutionary hero would neither forget nor betray the commitment he had made to me at Lancaster House.

I cast my idle imagination into the immediate future and saw in my mind's eye the ecstatic masses in Rhodesia. Having satiated themselves with, and memorised every minute detail of their revolutionary hero, General Tongogara, and having recorded for the umpteenth time his images appearing on Rhodesian Television, and stored safely away cuttings of his numerous appearances in the print media for future generations to see, they might begin to pay a little attention to the lesser heroes who accompanied him.

In my mind's eye I saw members of my family, especially my parents, casting their attention to those lesser heroes and beginning to discern similarities between one of them and their son, Agrippah. Excited and confused because the pictures highlighted General Tongo's features well, but were rather fuzzy when it came to pictures of those who accompanied him, I could see my parents seeking confirmation from those comrades they came across as to whether anyone knew someone by the name Agrippah Mutambara. Of course no one would. The personality known as Agrippah Mutambara disappeared the third day after entering a refugee camp for the first time and was superseded by another known as Dragon Patiripakashata. Records of any linkage between the two had been destroyed in one of the attacks by the Rhodesian soldiers. Even if my parents were to positively identify me as their son, none of my comrades could positively affirm that I was the same character known as Agrippah Mutambara before joining the Armed Struggle.

Visualisations of a like nature became my daily companions as I waited impatiently for the command to fly over to Mozambique to join Comrade Tongogara. I wondered if in fact such command would ever come. I pinned my hope on the absolute trust I had for the man who had given his word.

Finally my impatience was laid to rest and in a most dramatic and totally unexpected fashion. It was lunch hour and I was reclining on my bed for a short rest. My radio was tuned in to BBC because it seemed to show a keener interest in reporting news events in Rhodesia on a more regular basis. This was no surprise, for the British had a stake in the unfolding developments in its colony. I expected nothing of interest or significance from the BBC and yet routinely I always tuned to the station. Today I was paying little attention to the news and could well have been half asleep.

Even in my sleep-induced stupor, my mind absorbed everything that was said. It was as if I was in a dream where everything happened in real time. I forced myself off the bed to convince myself I was awake and not dreaming. I stared at the radio in disbelief and increased the volume. I did not have to wait long for a repeat of the news. "General Tongogara, the guerrilla commander of the ZANLA forces affiliated to Robert Mugabe, was killed in a road accident in Mozambique."

I felt numb. Was it possibly true that the hero of our struggle, the grand strategist, the prolific motivator, the commander of rare and unparalleled courage, and the survivor of many trying and seemingly unconquerable situations, had finally been cheated from claiming deserved glory for the successful end to a struggle that he so ably piloted?

In 1977, I recalled, Comrade Tongogara was involved in an accident on his way from Maputo to Chimoio. The car he was driving in, together with other senior members of ZANLA, hit a rhino. The rhino's horn went through the body of the car just missing Comrade Tongogara by a whisker. The injured frantic rhino in its bid to free itself from the car rolled from side to side, taking the vehicle with it. Having expended all its energy, the rhino finally died with its horn trapped in the car. Two members of Central Committee who accompanied Comrade Tongogara lost their lives in this incident. Miraculously, Comrade Tongogara survived with minor injuries. Following this tragic occurrence, Comrade President Mugabe issued a directive that no members of Central Committee would be allowed to travel the distance between Maputo and Chimoio by road, but only by air. Why then had Comrade Tongogara and his entourage decided to defy this directive?

The timing of the accident was most unfortunate. Coming just a few weeks after the ceasefire agreement was signed, wasn't this an ominous sign of bad things to come? On hearing news of Comrade Tongo's death, wouldn't the comrades in the operational areas be so incensed as to defy any orders to lay down their arms? Was it possible that Comrade Tongogara was a target for assassination? If so, could such assassination be the work of the Rhodesians or something engineered from within our own organisation? I wanted to reserve my judgment until I had the full facts surrounding the fatal accident.

My mind was in turmoil. Nothing seemed real anymore. To me Comrade Tongogara was an immortal being and my brain refused to accept that he

was dead. Besides, news over the radio was not the accepted official mode by which adversities, successes or any developments of significance were communicated within ZANLA. Maybe another commander had died and was mistaken for Comrade Tongo. It was possible too that if Comrade Tongogara was involved in an accident he might be seriously injured but not dead.

I cursed myself for speculating over such a serious matter when our headquarters was only a phone call away. I picked up the phone and dialed the numbers for our Head Office in Maputo. After three or four unsuccessful attempts the call finally went through.

As I waited to be connected to the most senior officer at the Head Office I dreaded asking the question that could confirm my worst fears. After what seemed an interminable delay, someone on the other end picked up the phone.

“ZANU PF Headquarters, can I help you?”

“Yes please. I am Comrade Dragon Patiripakashata, Chief Representative to Socialist Ethiopia. I just heard over BBC the shocking news that Comrade Tongogara is dead, can you confirm if this is true?”

“Regrettably Comrade Dragon, it is true...” the telephone receiver slipped from my hand. The person on the other end continued to talk but I neither had the strength to pick up the receiver nor the desire to continue listening to the speaker. A deluge of tears flooded my face and I had no inclination to stop them. I had not bothered to know the identity of the person I had spoken to. The person on the other end finally realising that the person who had called was no longer on the line hung the phone on its cradle.

My officers who were attracted by my noisy wailing wanted to know what had caused me so much pain and anguish. Between sobs and with great difficulty, I was able to mutter the dreadful words, “Co-m-ra-de Tongo is de-a-d.” They too joined the chorus of mourning.

It took me hours to begin to weigh the significance of the death of my inspirational hero. The immediate concern I had was that the ceasefire agreement could unravel, especially if the comrades suspected foul play in Comrade Tongo’s death. It was only natural for one to suspect foul play considering the incongruous timing of the accident – the very end of the difficult and arduous struggle that would usher in a new era of hope and

opportunities, especially for those who had been in the vanguard of the struggle.

The death of Comrade Tongo was a particularly bitter pill for me. Until news of the tragic accident I had expectantly visualised my triumphant return to Rhodesia. With Comrade Tongo, nothing could go wrong, or so I believed.

My thoughts went back to our last days together at Lancaster House. I saw his expression of misgiving that we were being forced to reach an agreement that was not totally acceptable to us. That expression of hopelessness was quickly replaced by the characteristic air of confidence that was the hallmark of Comrade Tongogara's character when he boldly stated that, "If we tell our forces that we are going home in a white plane with a red cross, anyone who shoots at that plane *tina yazibopa* (we will arrest)." As I recalled these words, once again it seemed to me that the strategist, who never left anything to chance, had predicted his own death. I had taken his words literally and missed the significance of what he had just said. If indeed he was predicting his death, was there something in his subconscious mind that made him feel he might not make it to independent Zimbabwe alive. There was, of course, the ever present danger that our Rhodesian foes would do everything in their power to eliminate him towards the end of our struggle. They would hope that his vigilance would be slack on the erroneous assumption that since an agreement had been reached the enemy would not seek to jeopardise its successful implementation.

In a discussion in Maputo in 2007 Ms Chamu Zvipangei, a private secretary to Comrade Tongogara and one of those who were in Comrade Tongogara's convoy on the day he died, revealed that she suspected foul play in Comrade Tongogara's death. According to her, the convoy consisted of two new Land Rovers that had been donated by the British government through the Tanzanian government. Before the fatal accident, the Land Rover that carried Comrade Tongogara had burst its new tyres on at least three separate occasions. It would be naive to conclude that these were just normal occurrences. Nonetheless, I did not suspect that anyone in ZANLA could have planned to assassinate Comrade Tongogara.

I decided not to focus my mind on unsubstantiated theories. Instead, my mind subconsciously recalled the glorious, humorous moments I shared with comrade Tongo. I saw us seated around a fire. Comrade Tongo and

eight other comrades, taking turns to crack jokes. These were memorable moments that lightened the burden of struggle. After we had exhausted our reservoir of jokes *ndugu** Boas Mataruse turned to me and remarked “Patiripakashata (where we are is dangerous), what shall we do?” I was caught off guard and did not know how to respond to the context in which my name had been used, and nor did the other comrades. The quick-witted Comrade Tongo quickly came to our rescue with his one word response, “*Tongogara*” meaning ‘we just have to stay’. Comrade Tongogara is the only person I knew who had an inexhaustible reservoir of jokes and humour.

On 26 December 1979 Comrade Rex Nhongo flew into Salisbury accompanied by other comrades to mark the beginning of the implementation of the Lancaster House Agreement and the cessation of hostilities between the Rhodesian and ZANLA forces. On this very day, 26 December 1979, our Chief of Defence gave his last breath, maybe signifying ‘mission accomplished’. Let us take a long pause and salute our hero of heroes.

Reminiscences did not alter the prevailing circumstance I found myself in – my return to Rhodesia in the company of Comrade Tongogara had been dealt a fatal blow. I remained in Ethiopia when our forces and our leadership moved into Rhodesia.

The ZANLA guerrillas and ZIPRA forces were directed to occupy predetermined but separate Assembly Points. The strategy that comrade Tongogara had drawn up just before his fatal accident was implemented to the letter by the ZANLA forces under the able leadership of the ZANLA Chief of Operations, Comrade Rex Nhongo, and provided a safety valve to continue the struggle in the event the enemy reneged on his promises.

There were numerous attempts to assassinate Comrade President Mugabe during the campaigning phase. His house in Highfields, a high density suburb of Salisbury (now Harare) was attacked, but he was not in, and a landmine exploded just after his car had passed on his way to address a rally in Fort Victoria (now Masvingo). Other attempts were foiled by the ZANLA security and the Lord’s own intervention.

I had hoped that my marching orders to return home would come before the elections were held, but that was not to be. Most of what happened during the period leading up to, and covering the elections, we heard over

the radio or from telephone conversations with comrades at our external Party Headquarters in Maputo.

On his way to Lancaster House, Comrade President Mugabe in the company of his Chief of Defence, Comrade Tongogara, had passed through Addis Ababa to appraise the Ethiopian leader, Colonel Mengishtu Haile Mariam, about political/military developments that had given birth to diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving the political crisis that pitted the Patriotic Front on one hand, against the Rhodesian and British governments on the other. He expressed his view that the Lancaster House Conference, like previous other attempts, would be stillborn. However, to thwart the enemy machinations aimed at derailing the achievements of the revolutionary armed struggle, there was need to intensify that struggle. Comrade President Mugabe appealed to Colonel Mengishtu to make provision for the training of a further 5000 ZANLA cadres as a matter of urgent necessity.

The death of Comrade Tongogara raised the spectre of the collapse of the implementation of the Lancaster House Agreement. With that in mind, Comrade President Mugabe wanted me to vigorously pursue the fulfilment of his earlier request for the training of more ZANLA cadres by Ethiopia. Understandably, that was the reason why I had been ordered to remain in Ethiopia when others made their way to participate in the historic transitional transformation from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe.

After the successful conduct of elections, for the first time run on the basis of universal adult suffrage, and the results of which gave an emphatic victory to ZANU, I became convinced that now there was no reason why I should be asked to remain in Ethiopia.

The arrival of Comrade Enos Nkala, a member of our Central Committee with responsibility for Finance, brought excitement to our office. He had been sent as an emissary of our President to deliver a letter to Chairman Mengishtu. Comrade Nkala also had another letter from our President and Commander-in-Chief of ZANLA addressed specifically to me.

The results of the elections in Rhodesia were now public knowledge. Nevertheless, we were eager to hear a firsthand account from Comrade Nkala of what transpired during the election period. We were held spell bound for at least twenty five minutes as we listened to his narration of events. The most vexing challenge for our Party had been how to provide adequate security to the ZANU leadership, especially President Mugabe.

There was no doubt at all that the Rhodesian regime would attempt to assassinate President Mugabe. Be that as it may, they were the only recognised authority, under the overall supervision of a British governor, Lord Soames, to provide security during the period leading to the elections and during the conduct of elections. Limited compromises were made for President Mugabe to be accompanied by a handful of his personal security details.

As mentioned previously, a number of attempts to assassinate comrade Mugabe were made. But these foiled attempts could not douse the revolutionary flame that the struggle had ignited. Instead they fanned it into an unstoppable inferno, burning its way through all the colonial regime's obstacles to an emphatic victory by ZANU PF.

After the brief from Mr Nkala, I was eager to read the contents of the letter from my President and Commander-in-Chief which I was convinced would finally herald my return to a new Zimbabwe. I sought the seclusion of my bedroom where I could allow my emotions to flow at the anticipated good tidings. I wished there was a camera to capture my joy the moment I opened the letter addressed to me from Comrade President Mugabe.

Filled with great excitement, I lay relaxed on my bed and tore open the envelope containing the long-awaited marching orders from my Commander-in-Chief and President of my Party. I had been longing for this moment to arrive, and now that it finally had, I wanted my body and mind to be totally relaxed as I digested every word from my Commander-in-Chief. The letter was dated 8 March 1980. As I read the first paragraph of the short, one-page letter, my excitement reached fever pitch and I could barely manage to control my emotions of joy (for a copy of this letter, see appendices on page 272).

The second paragraph, even though short by normal standards, was longer than the first. As I laboured through it, it seemed I had descended from the pinnacle of hope and excitement to the depth of despair. My Commander-in-Chief saw dark clouds hovering just above the horizon of a burgeoning independent Zimbabwe. He wanted me to press hard for the commencement of the training programme that I had thought was no longer necessary, just in case the dark clouds developed into a gathering storm. The letter that I had received with excited anticipation a while ago became the restriction order to my freedom to travel to Zimbabwe. Only my absolute faith in the wisdom of my President to make correct decisions gave

strength to my dampened spirits. My consolation was that the President had given his assurance that I would be in Zimbabwe for our independence ‘not later than 28th April’.

When the day arrived, it did so in a bizarre fashion. The messenger was a faintly typed telex message placed on top of my paper cluttered table. In anticipation of my departure for Rhodesia I had been ridding my office of all unnecessary papers. On this particular day I had been sorting out all the papers in the office drawers. Those I considered to be of value to the Party I stored in box files and those I regarded as trash I piled on my table with the intention of burning them at the end of the day. The hour to close the office arrived. I cleared the table of the papers I had categorised as unimportant and shoved them into a waste paper basket. As I left the office, I took the waste paper basket with me in order to incinerate the contents at the hearth in our sitting room.

I sat on the sofa enjoying the warmth of the fire whilst awaiting the announcement from Comrade Rodwell that our supper was ready. I had just started incinerating the papers in the waste paper basket when the announcement came.

“Comrade Dragon, food is ready; can you come and join us at the table?”

“Just give me a few minutes,” I answered, “I want to finish burning these papers.”

“No problem, let me know when you are ready,” Rodwell responded. “What was contained in the telex from Maputo?” He enquired as an afterthought.

“What telex?” my attention shifted from the waste paper basket to Comrade Rodwell.

“The one I left on top of your table sometime in the morning.”

“I saw no telex. Are you sure you put it on top of the table?”

“Sure as the sun rising from the east and setting in the west. I placed it right on top of the papers on your table, knowing you would never miss it,” the reply came back.

My heart skipped a beat. The papers he was alluding to were the ones I had categorised as unimportant, the very ones I was in the process of condemning to permanent destruction.

“Oh Jesus Christ,” I exclaimed, “Check amongst the papers remaining in the waste paper basket to see if by any chance it might be there.” Rodwell

emptied the contents of the basket on the floor and began sifting through the papers. The telex was not there.

“Maybe I have burnt the paper already or you are mistaken about where you put it,” I said, “I hope it was not urgent and very important. First thing tomorrow morning I want you to phone Maputo and ask them to resend the telex or reveal its contents over the phone. Next time you receive a telex or fax, you must immediately draw my attention to it and not just put it away,” I rebuked my comrade.

Just as I decided to burn the remaining papers, I realized I was clutching a few crumpled papers in my hand which I was about to throw into the fire when Rodwell came with the announcement of super. Luck was on my side. The sought after telex was among the papers in my hand. I straightened out the creases of the telexed message to make it readable.

Indeed the message was readable. It was digestible and it was sweet. I massaged it in my mind, swallowed every granule of its syllables, and derived satisfaction from its sweetness. Its delayed arrival did not affect its quality, but like wine that matures with age, improved its taste.

The gist of the message was that the independence date was set for 18th April 1980 and I was to fly immediately to Salisbury to take part in the celebrations.

Two or three days later I alighted from a British Airlines plane at Salisbury International Airport on 12 April 1980. There were no familiar faces. I could have passed for a tourist from a distant country, except that I had distinct Zimbabwean features and spoke perfectly the local *Shona* language.

I stood in a queue awaiting my turn to present my passport to the immigration officer. When it came, the officer took my passport and flipped it open. He looked at the picture in the passport and then at me. I believed this was standard procedure to confirm that the picture bore resemblance to the holder of the passport. I passed the test. The immigration officer’s interest shifted from the picture to the name of the passport holder. “Dragon Pa-ti-ri-pa-ka-sha-ta,” the officer read out my names slowly and deliberately highlighting the phonetic sounds of my second name.

“What an interesting name. You are Zimbabwean.” It was not a question; he was merely re-stating what was written in the passport. I saw no need to respond to that statement of fact.

“Where do you come from?” he enquired casually.

“Zimbabwe,” I told him what he already knew.

“I know you are Zimbabwean, but which part of Zimbabwe? This is the first time I hear the surname Patiripakashata.”

“Mozambique.” My response sounded illogical and appeared to evade the question asked.

“Don’t try to be funny with me, you just said you are Zimbabwean and your passport confirms that. Now you say you are Mozambican.”

“I did not say I am Mozambican, I meant I got the name from Mozambique,” I calmly responded.

“Is your father or mother Mozambican?”

“No, they have never been to Mozambique.”

With each answer I gave, the immigration officer became more and more confused and visibly irritated. Other arrived passengers queuing behind me to be served became angry too that I was wasting their time.

“Young man, if you do not cooperate with me you will have to stand aside and you will be served when everyone else has been served.”

“I think there is a misunderstanding Sir,” I responded calmly and respectfully, “Dragon Patiripakashata is a *Chimurenga* or Revolutionary name that I gave myself when I joined the armed struggle in Mozambique.”

Irritation and confusion were quickly swept aside. The transformation on the immigration officer’s face was genuine and pervasive. Those queuing behind me who had earlier shown frustration that I was wasting their time began to look at me differently.

“You mean you are a comrade?” the immigration officer asked with a face beaming with excitement.

“Yes I am,” I courteously responded.

“For how long have you been out of the country?”

“If you are asking about when I went out to join the struggle, the answer is, in early 1975. However between 1975 and today I have been in and out of the country several times engaging the enemy.”

For the next 30 to 40 minutes I paralysed the operations at the immigration counters as both officials and passengers were captivated by my presence. Many had seen ZANLA guerrillas from a distance or on television screens. To be within touching distance of one of the guerrillas was, for many, a dream come true. I had suddenly acquired celebrity status and one after another the airport officials and passengers took turns to have photos taken standing by my side. To top it all, many donated large sums of

money for me to go and enjoy myself. I was under no illusion at all that this overflowing of emotions and unbridled appreciation was not a tribute to me as an individual, but a big THANK YOU for all the comrades who had sacrificed their lives for the cause of freedom.

Number 88 Manica Road, Salisbury, was the physical location of the ZANU Headquarters in Rhodesia. I could think of no better place to begin my triumphant return. There was heightened security in and around the ZANU Headquarters. None amongst the youthful comrades guarding our headquarters were familiar to me. Either they were comrades who received their training after I had been posted to Ethiopia in July 1978, or *mujibhas* who received training in our liberated areas. There was overzealousness in the manner they carried out their responsibilities, with an air of arrogant superiority.

About 15 people were queuing in line waiting to be served when I arrived. Some wanted admission into the building for an appointment with an official, friend or relative, while others were soliciting for information on the possible whereabouts of relatives that went to join the struggle. The young sentries, proudly brandishing semi-automatic rifles, seemed in no hurry to serve the people. It seemed to them that their importance and superiority was directly related to the length of the queue waiting to be served. To eliminate the queue would erode their power and influence.

I jumped the queue and went straight to the entrance. Those standing in the queue began muttering complaints that I should wait my turn behind them. The two sentries manning the entrance looked at me with mocking interest, relishing the opportunity to demonstrate their superiority.

“Excuse me comrades,” I began, “I am Comrade Dragon Pati...”

“I don’t care what you call yourself, stand in the queue like everyone else,” one of the young sentries began exerting his influence.

“Why don’t you let me finish what I am saying before you interrupt me,” I said with an air of authoritative confidence.

The second sentry missed the significance and authority in my voice and, not to be outdone, moved closer to me and began shoving me backwards. I exploded inside. The rebel in me had been aroused. I was ready to boil over when the entrance door was flung open from inside. The two sentries, seeing who it was, immediately stood to attention and saluted their commander. The commander on seeing me, instead of responding to the

two sentries, also stood at attention and saluted me. “Oh! It’s a pleasant surprise to see you Comrade Dragon, when did you arrive? “

During the days leading to independence on 18 April 1980 I was accommodated at the Mushandira Pamwe Hotel in the high density suburb of Highfield in Salisbury, together with many other comrades. Our days and evenings were spent in celebratory mood. For those of us who at that time were heavy drinkers, there was never a shortage of well-wishers ready to foot the bill for whatever quantity of beers we wanted to gulp, as a way of expressing their gratitude for the sacrifices made by the comrades in prosecuting the armed struggle. Day in, day out, we would party and dance all day long and all night long.

At midnight on 17 April 1980 the British exorcised the colonial demon from our land by granting independence to their colony of Rhodesia, thereby giving birth to a new Zimbabwe with Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe as its first Prime Minister. Prince Charles officiated at the ceremony that ended 90 years of colonial rule and saw the historic lowering of the British flag and the raising of the Zimbabwe flag in its place. Comrade Agnew Kambeu* was given the enviable and historically significant responsibility of hoisting the Zimbabwean flag for the first time ever, signaling the demise of British colonialism in Rhodesia and the birth of the independent state of Zimbabwe.

Two weeks after returning to Zimbabwe, I moved from the Mushandira Pamwe Hotel to a Party house situated in the Waterfalls low-density area. During these two weeks, I had avoided trying to locate members of my family for fear that I might learn that those closest to my heart, especially my parents, might have died whilst I was out of the country. Julia, my sister, worked at Edgars Store in Harare, only three streets away from ZANU Headquarters. Our parents tasked her to constantly check with ZANU Headquarters to see if anyone had information on her brother who had disappeared in early 1975 and was presumed to have gone to join the ranks of the freedom fighters. Despite her persistent enquiries, no one knew of anyone answering to the name Agrippah Mutambara.

Julia never tired of going to ZANU Headquarters in the hope that she might by chance meet her brother or come across someone who knew him. On one such visit, she met Comrade John Chimbande* who had seen her come to the Headquarters on numerous occasions. John enquired why she was always coming to the Headquarters, to which she responded that she

was trying to locate her brother who left for the struggle five years ago. “What is the name of your brother?” Comrade Chimbande wanted to be of assistance.

“Agrippah Mutambara,” she gave the answer she had given many others for the umpteenth time.

“I am afraid I have not heard of such a name,” John answered. As Julia turned to leave, a thought struck him.

“You said your brother is called Agrippah, is that his Chimurenga name?” Julia seemed a little puzzled by the question and hesitated to answer.

“I want to know if Agrippah is the name given by his parents, or the one he was given when he joined the struggle,” Comrade Chimbande patiently explained.

“That is the name given him by our parents.”

“You might never find him by that name unless you accidentally meet him,” John said with finality.

“How then can I know what name he now uses?” What Comrade Chimbande had said generated new hope in Julia’s mind.

“Anyone who can answer that question will know where your brother is. Unfortunately, all comrades know each other by their Chimurenga names and it is a serious offence to ask one’s real name.”

The light that had been kindled was immediately snuffed out.

Dejected, Julia turned to leave. For the second time, Comrade Chimbande arrested her attention. “I am sorry not to be of assistance, but maybe if you can bring his photograph we might be able to recognise him from it.”

The proposal made a lot of sense. Why hadn’t she thought about it earlier on, maybe by now she would have known the fate of her brother? Julia thanked and bade Comrade Chimbande farewell, but only after she had secured an appointment to meet him the following day with a picture of her brother.

“Now let us see whether I can be of assistance to you today,” Comrade Chimbande addressed Julia as he welcomed her into his office the next day, “and please take a seat over there.” Julia complied and wasted no time retrieving the photo of her brother from her handbag.

“That is the most recent photo of him that I have,” explained Julia as she handed the picture over. As he studied the picture, a smile, hardly

discernible, spread over John's face and then disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. John picked up a phone and dialed a number. The person on the other end picked up the phone.

"May I speak to Comrade Dragon Patiripakashata please?" Julia did not hear the response from the other end.

"Oh yes, this is Comrade John Chimbande," John responded and listened to the person on the other end.

"Okay, leave him a message to contact me as soon as he comes to the office on Monday," John seemed to be winding up his conversation, and still holding the phone continued, "Comrade Dragon left for Fort Victoria this morning." He put the phone back on its cradle and looking at Julia enquired, "Did you hear what I just said?"

The question took Julia by surprise. She was not paying attention to the conversation between Comrade Chimbande and the person on the other end. "I beg your pardon, I thought you were still addressing the person on the other end," Julia politely responded.

"Comrade Dragon left for Fort Victoria early this morning," John repeated his words.

"Who is Comrade Dragon?" Julia was puzzled by the statement.

"He is your brother." Julia stared at Comrade Chimbande in utter bewilderment. The response was loaded with so much significance and she was tongue tied.

"You mean Agrippah is alive and well?" she finally regained her composure.

"I don't know about Agrippah, but Dragon Patiripakashata, the man in the picture you just showed me, is alive and well. In fact, yesterday when I saw you, I had just left Dragon in this office, seated exactly where you are seated now."

Monday, around 9.30 am, I got to ZANU Headquarters. Usually I would be in my office at 8.30 am but on this day I woke up late having arrived from Fort Victoria late Sunday evening. The routine in my office was to try and identify and link up comrades with their relatives. This was a very difficult task because most relatives did not know the *Chimurenga* names of the comrades they were seeking. Reuniting comrades with their families was a most fulfilling task that evoked all sorts of emotions. On average our success rate was three reunions per day. We did our best to console distraught families that our inability to link them to their loved ones did not

signify they were dead. The majority of the comrades were in Assembly Points and many others were studying abroad and would only return at the conclusion of their studies. We encouraged relatives to bring photos of their loved ones for purposes of visual identification. Most of our successes came by way of this method of identification. There were other instances, however, where we had the difficult and painful task of conveying the sad news that the comrade being sought was deceased.

As I was about to enter my office, a comrade handed me an envelope, addressed in big red capitals, "*FOR URGENT ATTENTION OF COMRADE DRAGON – FROM COMRADE JOHN CHIMBANDE.*" On entering my office, I sensed rather than saw the presence of a number of persons waiting to be served, as my attention was focused on the urgent message. I tore open the envelope and fumbled to take out the message as I sat behind my table.

“Agrippah!” The voice was distinctly my mother’s. The envelope and the partially extracted message slipped from my hands and fell to the ground. I looked towards the voice and there, right there, seated about a metre away from me, was my mother. Next to her was my father and next to my father was my sister Julia. We were all overcome with joy as we reached out and clung to one another, tears freely rolling down our cheeks. Our five years of separation had come to an end and in a dramatic fashion.

These scenes of jubilant reunion repeated themselves so many times, in so many different places throughout the whole length and breath of Zimbabwe. I was privileged and honoured to be counted among the many who took the courageous decision to join the armed struggle and fortunate, too, to have survived the arduous and protracted struggle which claimed many lives of our gallant fighters. Now was the time for my parents, who had endured a painful five years, unsure whether they would see me alive again, to celebrate my homecoming. The sweetness of the reunion helped atone for the many painful years of separation.

At the end of the day we reluctantly bade each other goodbye, but not before my parents had revealed their plans for a welcome party in my honor at our family house in Bindura during the coming weekend. Naturally I was excited about the proposition as it would enable me to meet many family members, relatives and friends in one day and at one location.

What had been planned as a simple get-together of between 50 and 100 relatives and friends turned out to be a mammoth event that defied any

prediction. From our rural home in Madziva Tribal Trust Land, about 45 kilometres from Bindura, my parents had slaughtered a cow and a goat. The meat from the two beasts was more than sufficient for the anticipated maximum number of invitees. Our guests started to arrive at 9 am, two hours earlier than the programmed arrival time of 11am. By 2 pm over 400 mostly uninvited guests had invaded our house and its environs.

News that a local son and guerrilla commander was being welcomed home had spread like veld fire around Bindura town. Such was the enthusiasm to meet the local hero that the reaction was spontaneous and overwhelming. My parents, realising that the meat they had prepared was not going to be enough, sent for another cow to be slaughtered at our rural home.

The party that was supposed to end by 8 pm went on throughout the whole night. The singing of revolutionary songs and the excited noises from the gathering that had swollen close to one thousand was an irritant to our white neighbours. The police were called in to either disperse or quieten the crowd. Both the police and the remonstrating whites were nearly lynched by the excited and mostly inebriated crowd. The police took the logical decision to let the party go on without let or hindrance, much to the chagrin of the complaining neighbours.

* Comrade Chamu Zvipange's real name is Oppah Muchinguri. She served in different ministerial appointments after independence and also as governor of Manicaland province. She is currently a member of the ZANU (PF) central committee and sits in the politburo as Secretary for Women and Gender Affairs, as well being the Minister of Women's Affairs.

* In *Swahili*, a language spoken mostly in Tanzania and other East African countries, *ndugu* is a word that means comrade.

* Comrade Agnew Kambeu's real name is Amoth Norbert Chingombe. He served in the Zimbabwe National Army and retired as a Lieutenant General. He died on 9 June 2008 and was declared a national hero.

* At the end of Zimbabwe's struggle, John Chimbande was the Chief Representative of ZANU to Tanzania and is currently serving in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Chapter 12

EULOGY TO REVOLUTIONARY HEROES

The vision and courage of those who preceded me helped to shape my own vision and courage. The rebel in them combined with and refined the rebel in me and gave it revolutionary flavour and purpose. Were it not for them, I doubt that the rebel in me could have found expression through revolutionary armed struggle.

I looked into the eyes of Cuthbert as he lay on the hospital bed. The courage in his eyes and the wisdom in his words were there for me to see and hear, emulate and embrace. How could I miss such golden opportunity? Not pain, not torture, not even the promise of freedom and fortune, could shake the foundations of his revolutionary resolve to sacrifice, if need be, his life for that which he held so dear. I was not present when he was dragged to the gallows, a sacrificial lamb for the armed struggle; but I can imagine the torments of his black guards, eager to appease the devilish ego of their white masters, taunting him to walk on his remaining leg. Unable to do so unsupported, I can further imagine them dragging him; his naked belly scrubbing the hard ground, in order to inflict maximum pain to his body and cause him humiliation. Unable to extract a tear from his tortured soul and bruised body, I can imagine the frustration of his gleeful and bloodthirsty tormentors, looking for signs of pain and fear from the brutalised body and tortured but unyielding soul that lay before them, before they could pounce for the final kill. His only tears were the blood that freely oozed down his scarred face and ruptured body and that nourished his resolve for freedom. His pain was hidden behind the fearless mask of courage that his face wore. Yes, I can imagine him standing tall and supremely proud as the noose around his neck became his balancing second leg.

Death was our constant companion; too constant to bring grief and mourning, but most certain to forge oneness of purpose and to be a cause for celebration. Indeed, the death of a comrade became a cause for

celebration. It was not celebration for the loss of the flesh, but for the courage and purity of the spirit that in our eyes had turned every dead comrade into a martyr for our revolutionary struggle. We saw so many deaths and shed so many tears. We had no more tears to shed. Our bullets became our only tears.

We all worked on the basic premise that we would not live to see a free and independent Zimbabwe. Equally too, we were of the unshakeable conviction that those who came after us would accomplish the task we had begun and enjoy the fruits of our labour. This became the foundation of our doctrine of a protracted armed struggle. We defined our fight as a just struggle in which there could be but one victor, the People as led by us.

Lamentably, history remains unkind to the memory and achievements of our revolutionary heroes and their leadership. This is so because the tools to interpret and propagate the history of our struggle largely remain in the hands of those whom we vanquished.

Amongst our living heroes, Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe stands a cut above the rest. He was the visionary of our struggle whose words became prophetic. His vision, wisdom and courage moulded him into a dynamic leader for the armed struggle and a potent force against the enemy. With seven academic degrees to his credit, many of which were obtained in incarceration, none can dare challenge his intellectual credentials.

Comrade Mugabe's background as a teacher must have contributed immensely to the enhancement of both his language construction skills and powerful oratory. He is a consensus builder who likes to involve the different echelons of his Party in the formulation of policy. His political acumen and shrewd negotiating skills enable him to influence the final outcome of policies. During the armed struggle, Comrade Mugabe demonstrated total loyalty to the cause for freedom and independence. His strict adherence to principles endears him to many and invites loathing from a few others. Indeed, those who love him do so with a passion and those who hate him equally do so with a passion.

Because of his high academic qualifications and natural intellect, Comrade Mugabe never feels intellectually challenged or inferior. Contrary to falsehoods peddled by West European countries and the United States of America, knowing full well they are false, I dare add, Comrade Mugabe does not assassinate opponents physically; he outshines and out manoeuvres them, and liquidates them intellectually.

Before I joined the struggle I had heard a lot about Comrade Mugabe, but I had never met him. During the struggle I had the fortune and pleasure to meet the inspirational *guru* and work with him. I got to know him, to like him, and to love him. The revolutionary armed struggle turned us into blood brothers.

Every man (or woman) has their own weaknesses. Comrade Mugabe is no exception. ‘Let him without sin cast the first stone.’ Having said this, the grand sacrifices and contributions Comrade Mugabe made for Zimbabwe deserve every Zimbabwean’s forgiveness for any minor indiscretions attributable to him.

I believe I can lay claim to knowing Comrade Mugabe exceedingly well. If one was to pose the question, ‘which are the greatest weaknesses of Mugabe?’ my first simple and honest answer would be, ‘the teacher in him.’ He sees the weaknesses in others not as reason for retribution, but as the teacher’s challenge and responsibility to educate, re-direct and bring into conformity. In his eyes, failure to achieve this is reflective of a disconnection between a professor and his student. He thus exhibits patience and tolerance to the under performer, and goes the extra mile to rehabilitate them.

My second equally simple and honest answer would be, ‘his love for his people.’ By ‘his people’ I am alluding mainly to the very poor in society, especially the rural folk. Some economists have castigated his policies aimed at ameliorating the suffering of the poor as being ruinous. To the contrary, any failure to bring the poor into the mainstream of production can be attributed to some unscrupulous officials who undermine his good intentions and waylay that which is intended for the very poor to satiate their own greed.

Comrade Mugabe never forgets those who he has been through difficulties with. He always tries to prop them up when they fall, even at the risk of being brought down by them.

Arguably, Comrade Mugabe’s perceived weaknesses could well be his greatest strengths.

‘What is Mugabe’s greatest strength?’ Again I have a simple and honest answer to this question – ‘his strict adherence to principles.’ Even when everyone else deserts him, Comrade Mugabe will sacrifice everything, including his reputation, to uphold his principles. This explains why, despite being vilified by the British, Americans and other European countries (and

some black surrogates too!), he remains steadfast that LAND must be fairly redistributed to correct the colonial injustices that deprived the majority black population of land in favor of a tiny white population. LAND was the main grievance for launching an armed struggle against British colonists and their extension, the Smith regime; and its equitable redistribution remains sacrosanct.

Comrade Mugabe's fortitude and presence of mind defies his age. Those who claim to know him well are constantly amazed to discover that his depth of character is deeper than they ever imagined. Comrade Mugabe seems to be in a state of perpetual regeneration. He shall remain, forever, an enigma.

True indeed, Comrade Mugabe has been demonised for upholding his sacred principles. Those who have stood by him have been labeled Mugabe's cronies. As for me, to be labeled a crony of Mugabe is a badge of honor that I wear with pride.

It is most unfortunate that I never got the opportunity to get to know first hand Comrade Herbert Wilshire Chitepo. I am not the best qualified to comment on his character. However, such was the pivotal leadership role Comrade Chitepo played in advancing our struggle that, through our orientation classes and first hand accounts of those who had the privilege of working with him, I got to know the man's character, appreciate his immense contribution to the advancement of our struggle, and acknowledge his selfless spirit.

It is no mean achievement for one to climb the success ladder to become a lawyer of repute and the first black advocate in one's country. Neither is it a mean sacrifice for such an accomplished lawyer and advocate to forsake such glory to heed the calling of his Party (ZANU) to organise and lead a burgeoning guerrilla force against the formidable and well-equipped professional army that the Rhodesian forces represented. In heeding the call, Comrade Herbert Wilshire Chitepo was undaunted by the enormity of the challenge that carried enormous personal risk and, as fate would have it, eventually led to his death.

It would be remiss of me not to single out for special mention two commanders who left behind their indelible footprints in the history of our struggle for freedom and independence. These are none other than Comrades Josiah Magama Tongogara and Rex Nhongo.

Comrade Tongogara was a towering figure of our struggle, both physically and intellectually. I first met him at Chimoio ZANLA Headquarters in 1976 after his release from Zambian prisons alongside others of our leaders. The youthful ZIPA leadership, who had inspired us to fight harder in order to put pressure on the Zambian government to release our imprisoned leadership, changed their tune when it became certain that their release was imminent. Out of the blue they began casting aspersions against that leadership, accusing it of capitulation while incarcerated. Even Comrade Mugabe, whom we had been persuaded to accept as the successor to Ndabaningi Sithole, the first President of ZANU who had reneged on the struggle, was not spared the wrath of the ZIPA leadership.

When Comrade Tongogara first addressed us, seated beneath the trees, we were not sure who to believe – this tall charismatic commander we hardly knew, or the ZIPA (ZANLA) leadership which was the only one we had known, but who were making a u-turn on the orientation they had given us in the past. At first there was resistance in responding to Comrade Tongogara's slogans praising comrade Mugabe, but if you felt his penetrating gaze on you, you would reluctantly lift your clenched right fist and respond. If there is one person who single handedly and assiduously worked for President Mugabe to be known, understood and accepted by the comrades during those early days, that man is Comrade Tongogara.

The most striking feature of Comrade Tongogara was his intellect. Amongst all the comrades it was generally accepted that Comrade Tongogara was a strategist, quick witted, and could handle any situation. He inspired so much confidence amongst comrades, could identify and develop talent and was fair, with no tribal leanings. His sense of humour was natural and effortless. Comrade Tongogara was a gifted orator who was economical with his words when addressing rallies. He always left a lasting impression on his audience. He exhibited rare courage and unquestionable commitment to the cause for freedom.

Posthumously, Comrade Tongogara needs to be awarded honorary degrees and be decorated with the highest honours the nation can give.

Comrade Rex Nhongo complemented Comrade Tongogara very well as his deputy and Chief of Operations. The most outstanding characteristic of Comrade Nhongo was his stammer.

When the ZIPA leadership, in which he was the most senior, sought to disown President Mugabe and the leaders who were being released from

Zambian prisons, Comrade Rex Nhongo took an independent and opposing view. Independence of opinion was the hallmark of his life.

Comrade Nhongo was a hands-on commander who led from the front. He could analyse the war situation well and inspired his subordinates by his acts of bravery. He mixed freely and easily with all comrades, irrespective of rank or status.

The struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe is replete with revolutionary heroism. Many comrades, fighters and refugees alike, paid the supreme sacrifice in the fight for freedom and independence. The mass graves in Mozambique and Zambia bear testimony to this. In Botswana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and many other countries in Africa, and even as far afield as Russia, China, Romania, Yugoslavia, Cuba and many other places, the remains of our fallen comrades are also eternally interred.

Innocent civilians in countries that provided sanctuary to our fighters and refugees, especially in Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana, often found themselves targets of the vengeful colonial war machine spearheaded by the Rhodesian forces. The wanton acts of aggression against these states emboldened and galvanised their resolve to see the destruction of the Rhodesian regime and the birth of an independent and democratic state of Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe itself, the revolutionary winds of change buffeting the beleaguered settler regime of Ian Smith, turned this regime into a ruthless monster that brutalised and devoured its own citizens and used all means possible, including those proscribed by international conventions, to halt and reverse the gains of the liberation struggle and to stem the tide of its growing popular support at home and abroad.

The enemy poisoned water wells in areas where freedom fighters were known to frequent, aimed at massacring them and the masses that gave them support. Foodstuffs and items of clothing were also laced with poison. Many civilians lost their lives in support of the just struggle. These ruthless tactics of annihilation and subjugation never succeeded in swaying the resolve of our masses from supporting the armed struggle.

Those of our comrades who were captured by the regime's forces were subjected to the most brutal treatment and torture that left many of them dead or maimed for life. Most of those killed had their bodies dissolved in acid or thrown into disused mine shafts.

We are who we are today because of the supreme sacrifice of those comrades who took up arms against the racist colonial regime that we fought and vanquished. Many of our comrades perished in that struggle and many more after the attainment of independence. But a sizeable proportion of the comrades are living up to this day.

We are who we are today because of the immense courage and spirit of selfless sacrifice of our masses who refused to submit to the whims and designs of the colonists who were ruthless to the extreme and better equipped than the freedom fighters, but morally bankrupt. Our masses preferred death to servitude.

Our freedom and independence is founded on a rock solid foundation of principles, courage, and selfless sacrifice and sealed by the blood of our fallen heroes. As a nation, let us bury whatever differences divide us and pay homage to our revolutionary heroes. While it is an undeniable reality that the remains of many of our heroes shall forever remain interred in shrines in countries that gave us sanctuary during the struggle, there are some of our commanders whose remains have not been given a befitting reburial at our shrines. These include comrades Tinzwei Goronga, our provincial commander and member of the High Command, Comrade Ziso, a member of the High Command, Comrade Jani, a member of General Staff who was killed at the same time and same place with Comrade Goronga and, without doubt, many others known to our fighters who survived the struggle. These are our deserving national heroes. Let their remains be brought home and accorded decent reburial. At the very least, let them be declared national heroes so that their families can be assisted alongside those of other national heroes lying at our National Heroes' Acre. If this is not done during the lifetime of those who fought side by side with them, most certainly they will be forgotten forever.

Let us pause again to salute all our revolutionary heroes.

Thanks to all those who selflessly were willing to sacrifice their lives, the battle for freedom and independence was won. However, success in the war against capitalist exploitation remains an intractable and illusory dream. Capitalist mutation has taken place through recruitment from our ranks of 'daytime socialists' who turn out to be 'night time capitalists'. As the ranks of committed revolutionary cadres dwindle through natural attrition, those of the pseudo socialists experience a multiplier effect.

When we first celebrated our independence, the capitalists celebrated with us too, but for different reasons. Throughout our struggle, the capitalists were busy recruiting, training and deploying their surrogates amongst us. Many of these grew up and studied in capitalist countries, emulated the capitalist culture, and had an unquenchable appetite for wealth. All they needed to do was to become acceptable to ZANU by claiming membership of the party, chant ZANU slogans the loudest, sing ZANU songs and preach the socialist gospel, even without being socialists. Their high academic qualifications and professed allegiance to ZANU would stand them in good stead if they vied for government or party leadership positions. The comrades who participated in the armed struggle, most with a low level of education, were to be denied any meaningful positions and completely cut off from expressing their anguish and views to President Mugabe. The communication skills they had acquired and sharpened during the struggle and used most effectively to win the party a resounding victory in 1980 were completely ignored. The pseudo socialists are conspicuous by their dutiful attendance at presidential rallies and strategic positioning to catch the president's eye, in a manner suggestive that they are the true loyalists to the party and its president.

I lack the words to succinctly express the debt of gratitude that the nation owes to our dead and living heroes who took up arms to liberate our country. How can we be blind to the selfless sacrifices of our masses that, without arms, stood against the might of a vicious colonial regime to lend support to their children waging a just struggle? Now that we are independent, can we forget the resolute support that Samora Machel and the Mozambican people, Julius Nyerere and the Tanzanians, Mengishtu Haile Mariam and the Ethiopian people, Kenneth Kaunda and the Zambian people, Sir Seretse Khama and the Botswanans, and many others, gave in order for Zimbabwe to be free and independent today?

Let me end my eulogy with a poem for our departed revolutionary heroes. (Adapted from a poem I wrote on the occasion of the passing on of Comrade Agnew Kambeu, aka General Amoth Chimombe):

In loving memory of our departed revolutionary heroes

Death is a cruel and silent stalker. It hides in dark secret corners and pounces on unsuspecting victims.

Death knows no respect. If it did, Comrade Joshua Nkomo, Comrade Simon Muzenda,* Comrade Tongogara, Comrade Herbert Chitepo and all other revolutionary heroes could be spared its agonising visits.

Death shows no mercy. It ignores the anguishes and passionate pleas of friends and relatives, and never leaves behind those it visits.

Death sows pain in the fields of happiness. It douses the flames of laughter with showers of tears.

Death inflicts deep and painful wounds. Its wounds heal with time, but the scars they leave behind last forever.

Death is certain. Just as every coin has a flipside, the flipside of life is death.

Death is a lone journey. Coming to life also is a lone adventure.

Goodbye our departed revolutionary heroes.

May you in death discover a new life? May that life forever conquer death?

* Comrade Simon Vengai Muzenda was Vice-President of ZANU (PF) and Vice-President of the Republic of Zimbabwe. He died on 24 September 2003 and was declared a national hero.

Appendices

ZANLA Training Syllabus

Module	Duration
Political Orientation	4 weeks
• Pouring out national grievances	
• The People's Army	
• The people's war	
Weapons handling	7 weeks
• Semi-automatic rifle (SAR)	
• Sub-machine gun (AK-47)	
• Light Machine Gun (LMG)	
• Rocket launcher	
Sentry Duties	1 week
Field Craft	4 weeks
• Individual action	
• Group action	
• Squad / section actions and formations	
First Aid	1 week
Engineering	1 week
• Demolitions	
• Landmines	
Specialisation (one of the following)	4 weeks
• Engineering (Demolition and Use of mines)	
• Artillery – Anti-aircraft (AAMG)	
• Artillery – Recoilless rifle (75mm)	
• Artillery – Mortar (82mm)	
• Radio communication	
Theory of guerrilla warfare	3 weeks

• Strategy and tactics	
• Military intelligence	
Field practice of guerrilla war	
• Platoon and company formations and operations	
• Ambushes and surprise attacks	

ZIPA Military Committee

Rank of Cadre	Name of Cadre	Organisation
Army Commander	Rex Nhongo	ZANLA
Deputy	John Dube	ZIPRA
Political Commissar	Alfred Mangena	ZIPRA
Deputy	Dziniashe Machingura	ZANLA
Director of Operations	Elias Hondo	ZANLA
Deputy	Enoch Tsangano (Jevan Maseko)	ZIPRA
Director of Security and Intelligence	Gordon Munyanyi (Captain Tapson Sibanda)	ZIPRA
Deputy	James Nyikadzinash	ZANLA
Director of Political Affairs	Webster Gwauya	ZANLA
Deputy	David Moyana	ZIPRA
Director of Logistics and Supplies	Report Mpoko	ZIPRA
Deputy	Edmund Kaguru	ZANLA
Director of Training and Personnel	Ambrose Mutinhiri	ZIPRA
Deputy	Parker Chipoera (Bounard Manyadza)	ZANLA

Director of Medical Services	Augustus Mudzingwa	ZIPRA
Deputy	Tendai Pfepferere	ZANLA



LET US FIGHT AND REBUILD
ZIMBABWE

Z. A. N. U.

Zimbabwe African National Union

Date 8th March, 1980.

Dept Presidency

Ref _____

Headquarters:

Caixa Postal, 743
MAPUTO
Mocambique

Mailing Address: Z.A.N.U. (P.F.),
88 Manica Road,
SALISBURY.

Comrade Dragon Patiripakashata,
ZANU Chief Representative,
Addis Ababa,
Socialist Ethiopia,

Dear Comrade Dragon,

I am sure all of you there are jubilant that we won the elections so resoundingly. We are now busy forming a government.

I hope our Ethiopian programme has started taking shape. If it has not, please press hard for its beginning. You should not be too eager to come home yet. There is still lots of work for you to do there. We shall, however, ensure that you are here before independence, which should not be later than 28th April.

All the comrades there should continue to study hard. We shall need all their skills.

Comradely regards.

Yours in the struggle,

R. G. Mugabe.
President.

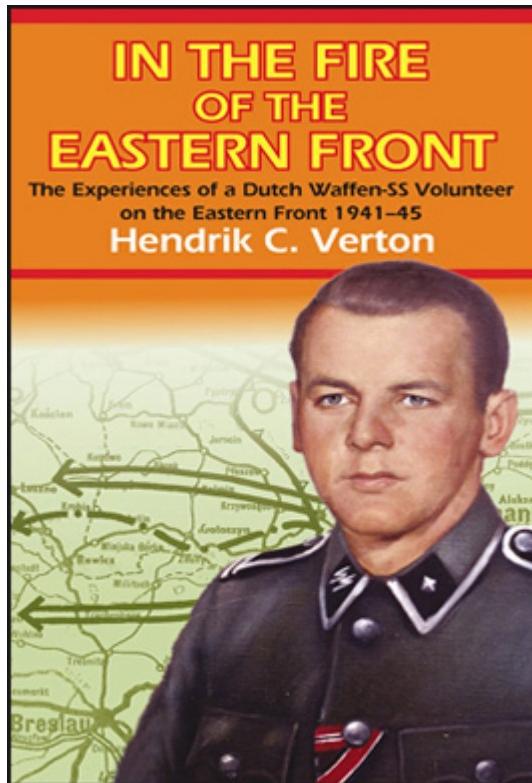


RGM/t.c.

Pamberi neChimurenga
Pambili nempi ye Nkululeko
"Forward with the Revolution"

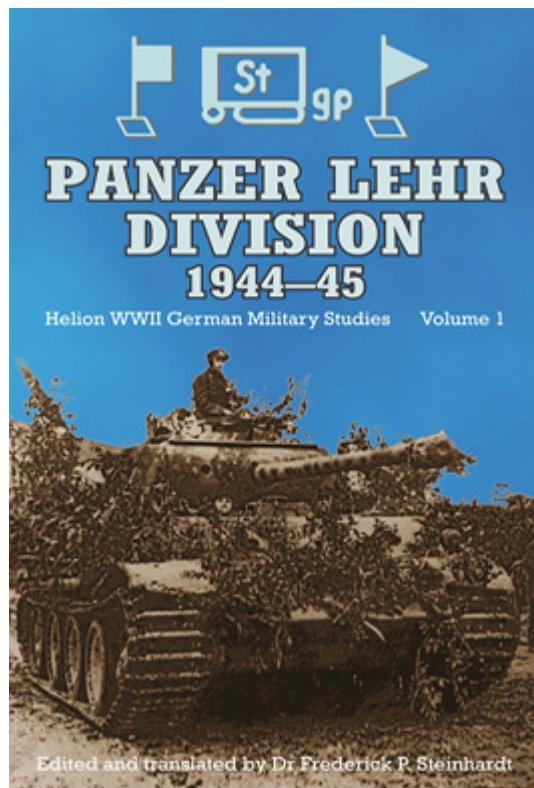
The letter from President Mugabe to the author in Ethiopia, March 1980.

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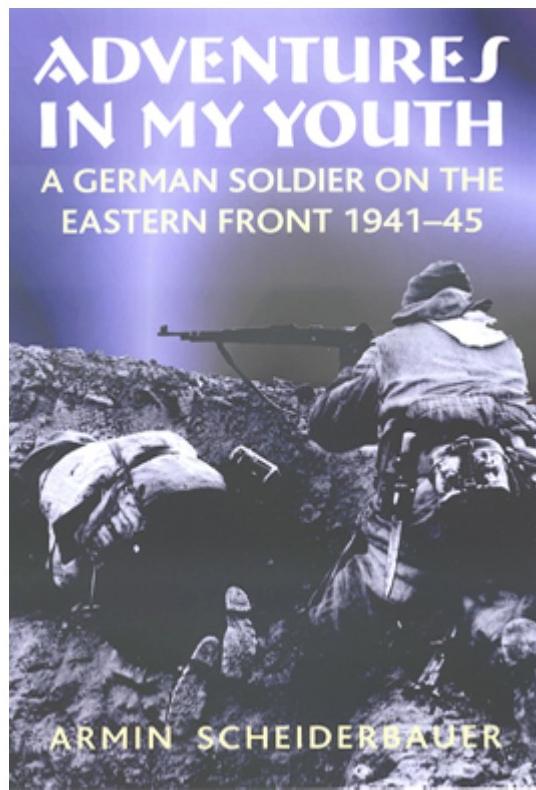
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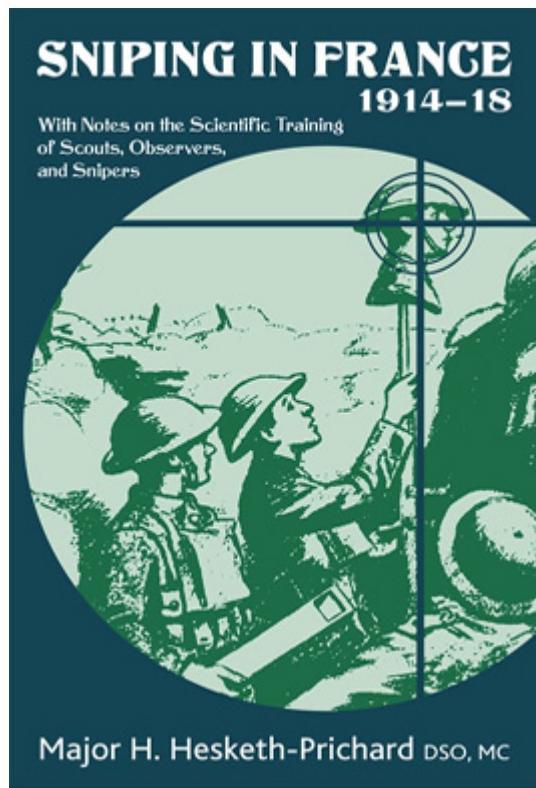
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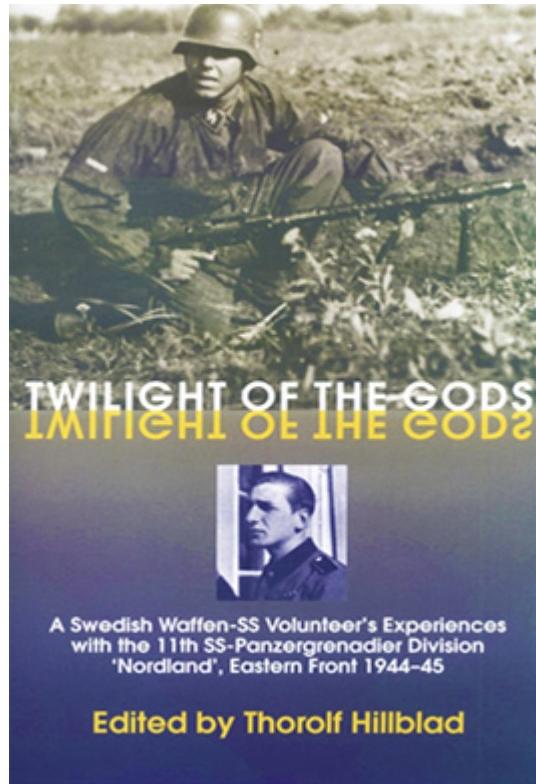
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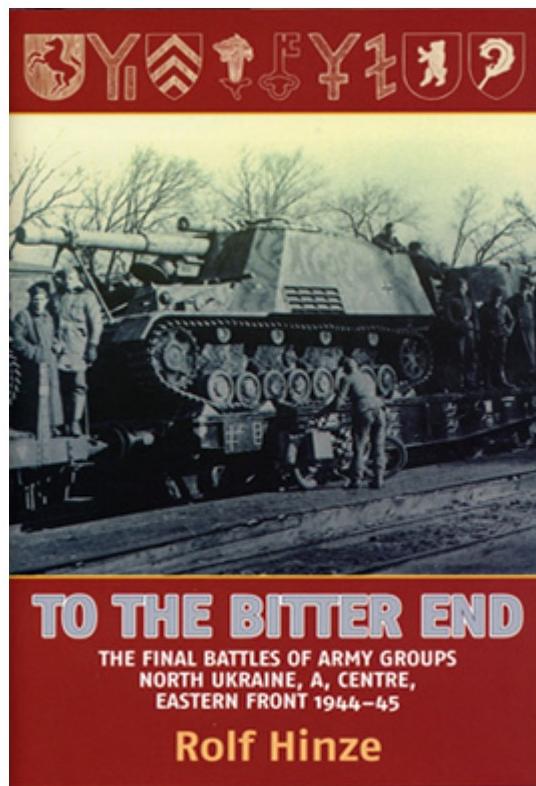
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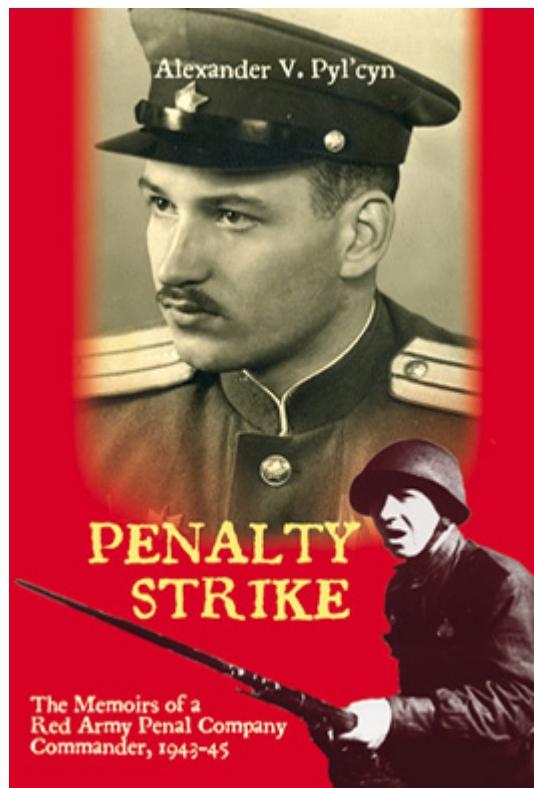
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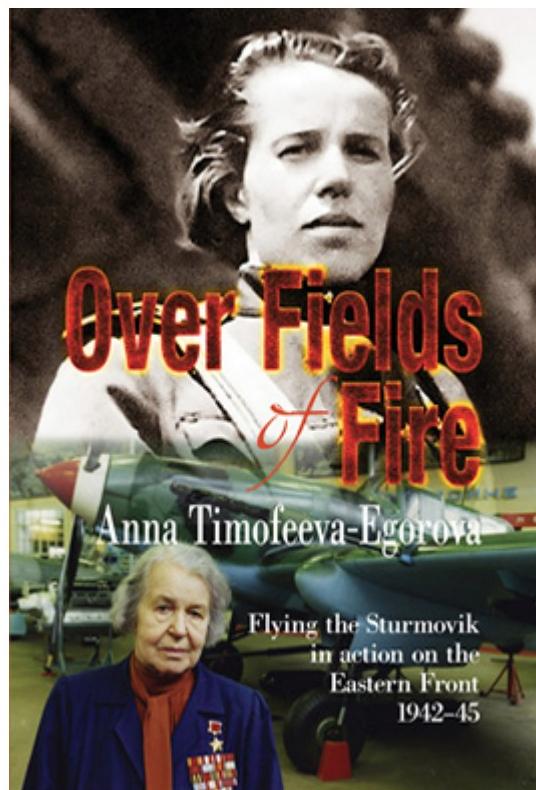
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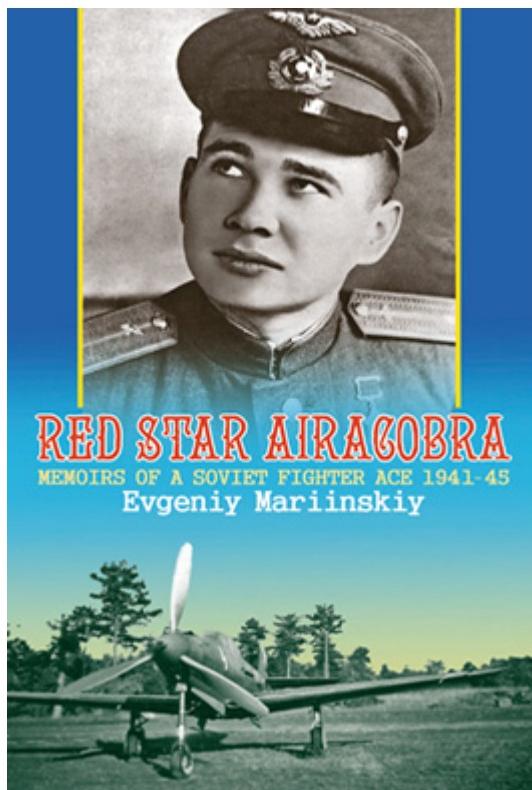


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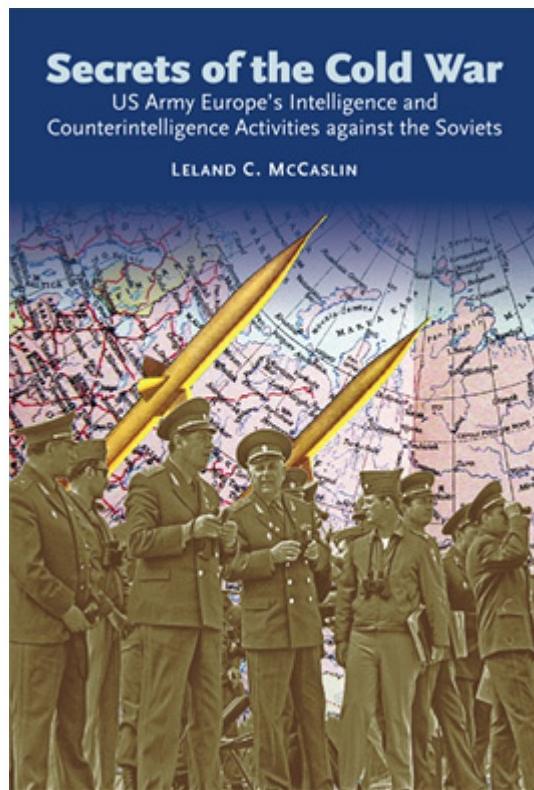


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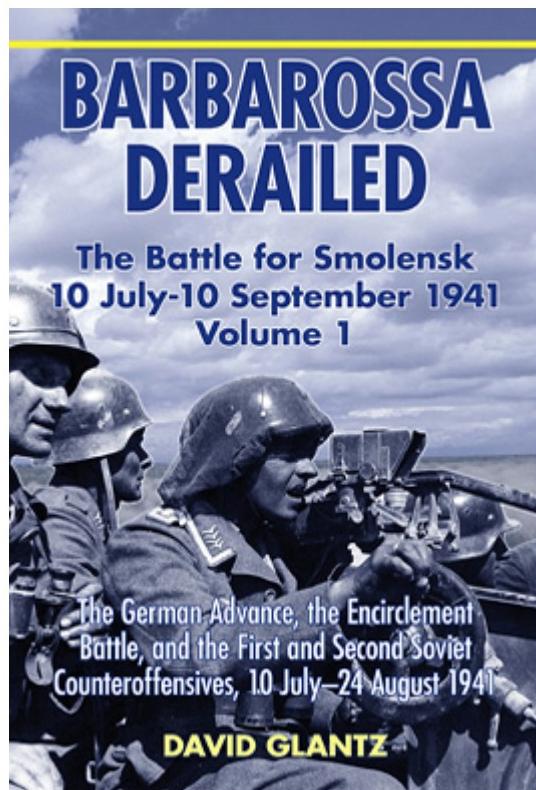


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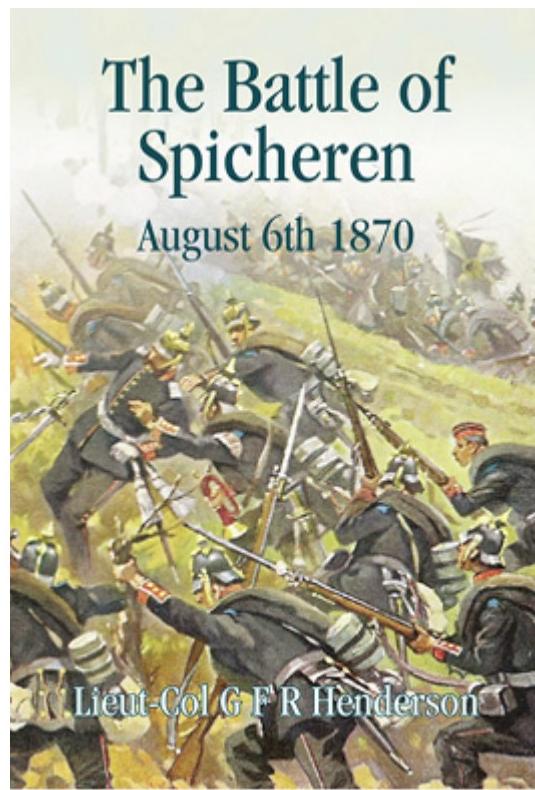


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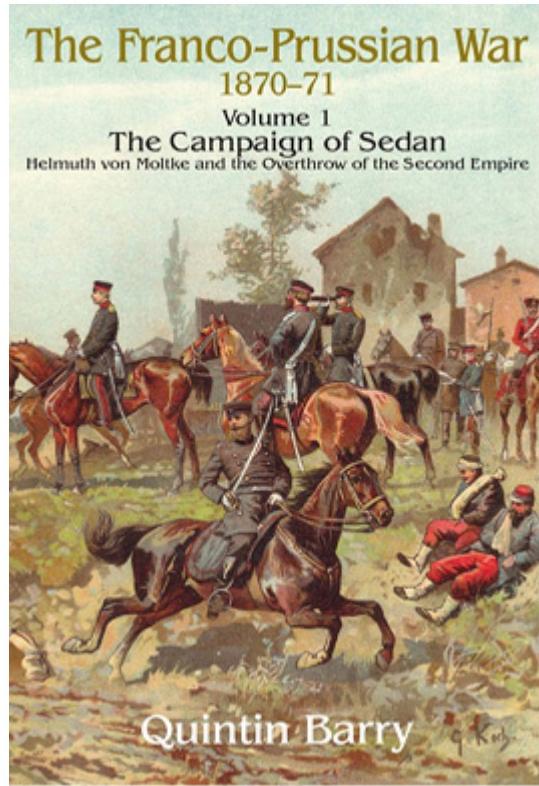


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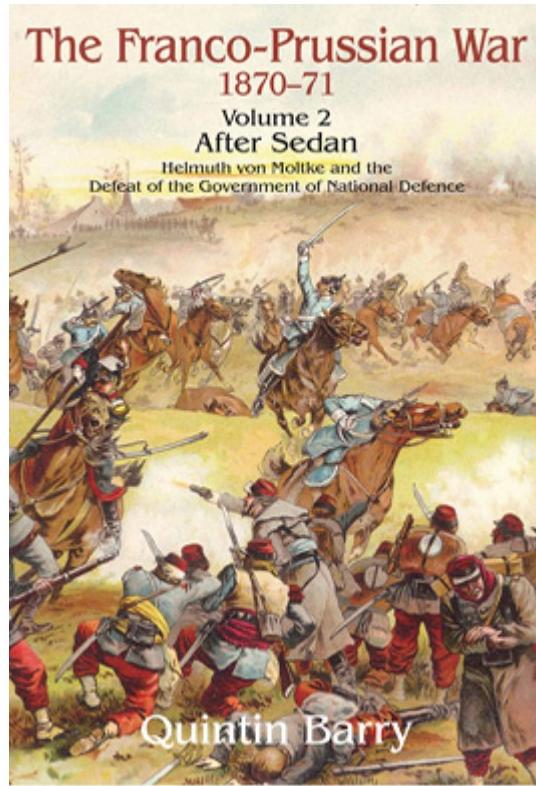
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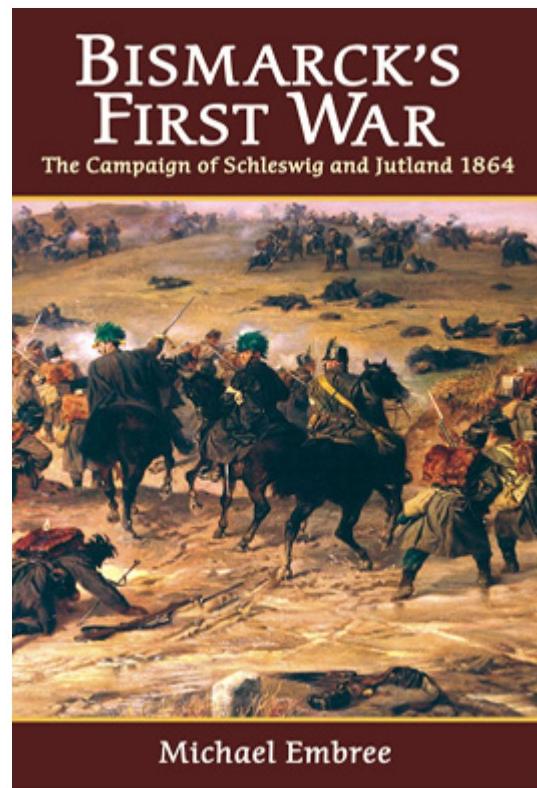
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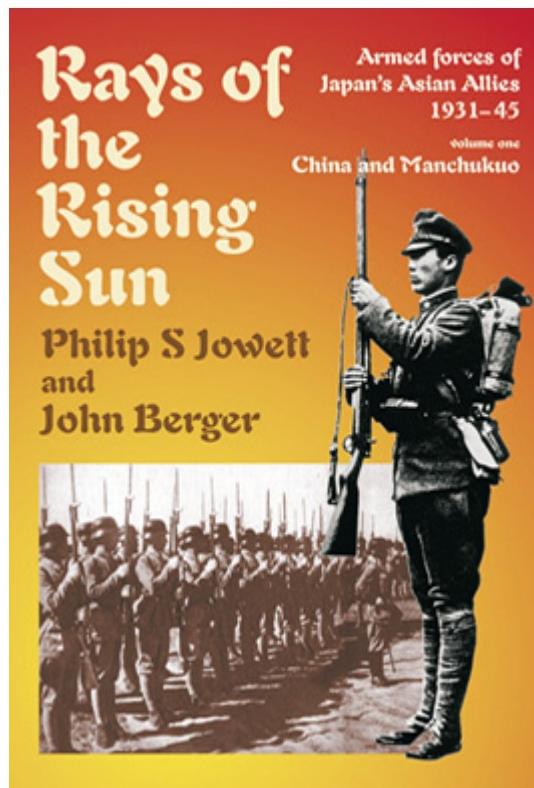


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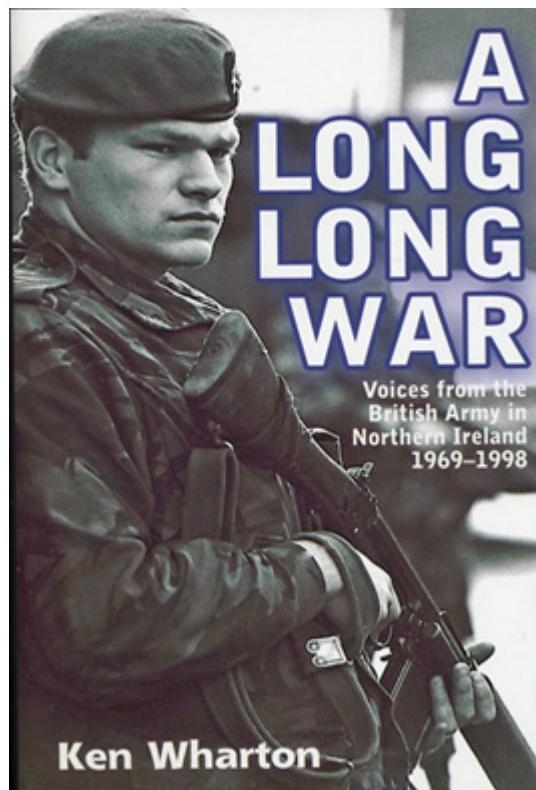
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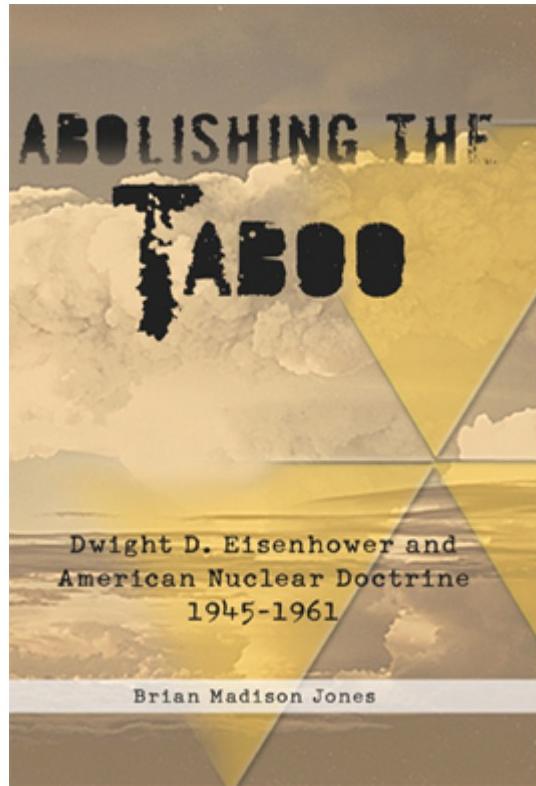
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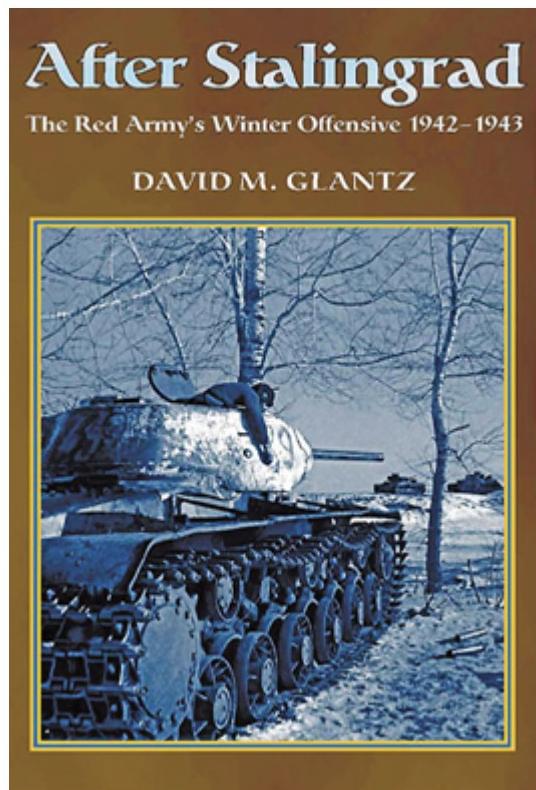
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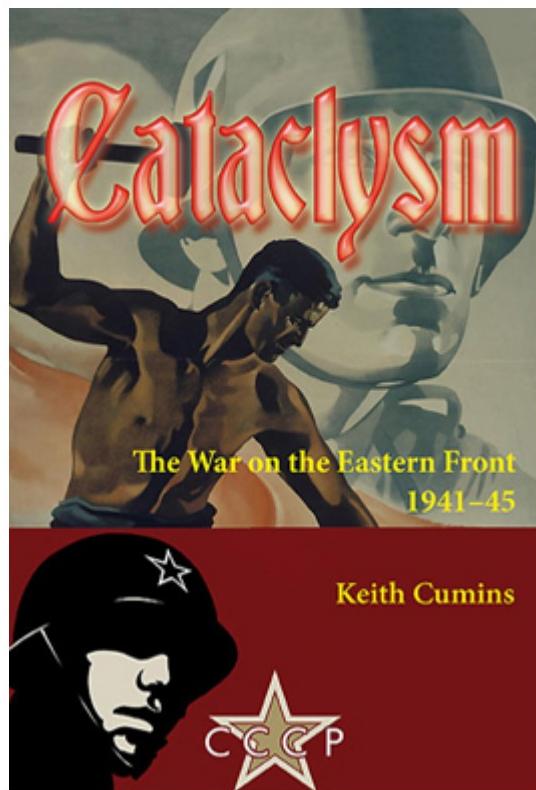


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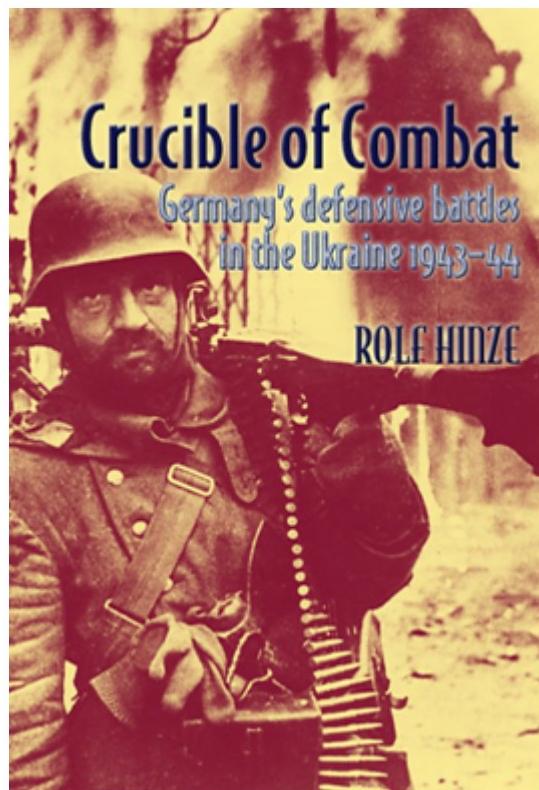
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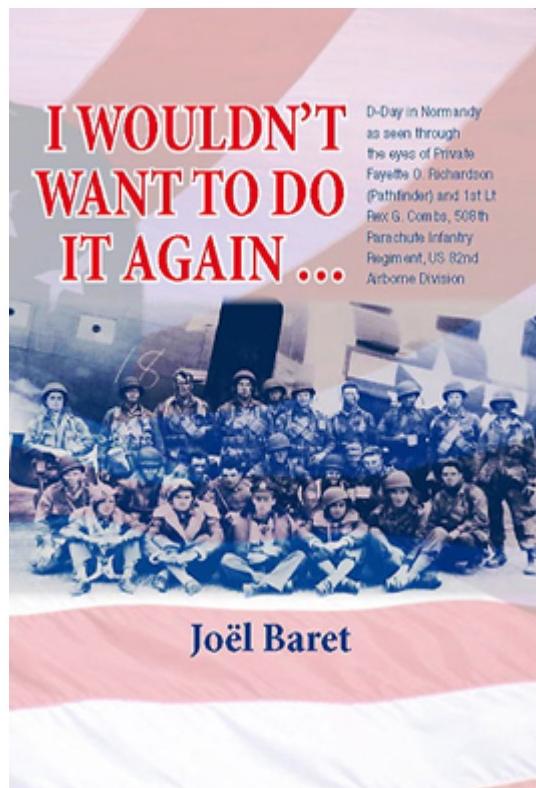
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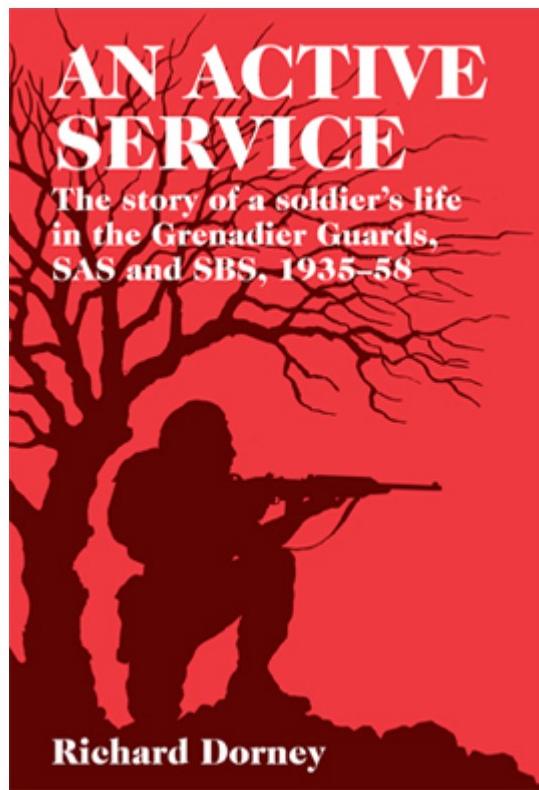
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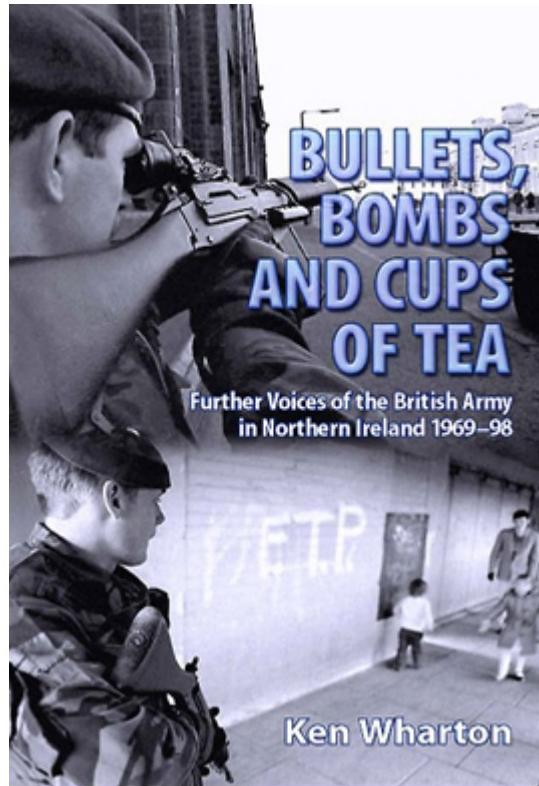
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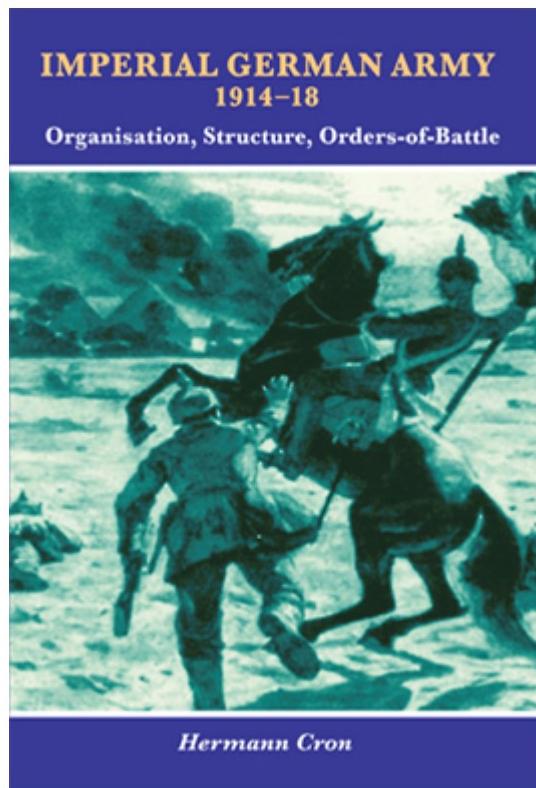
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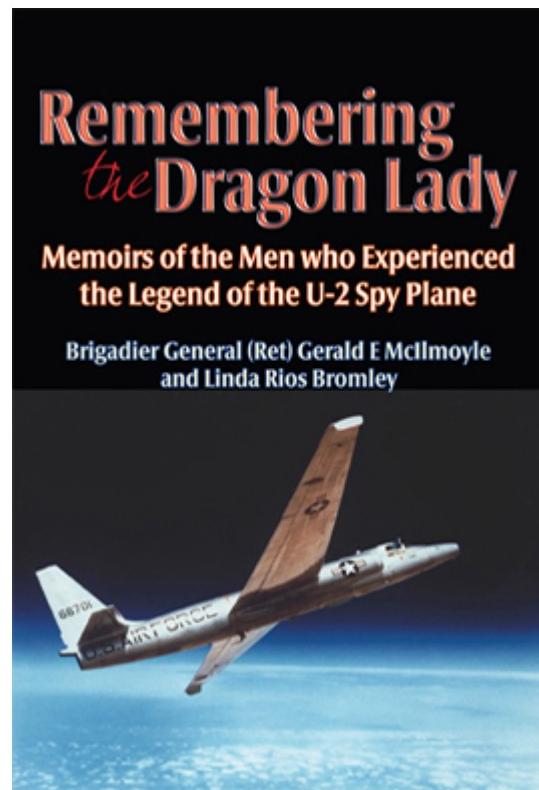
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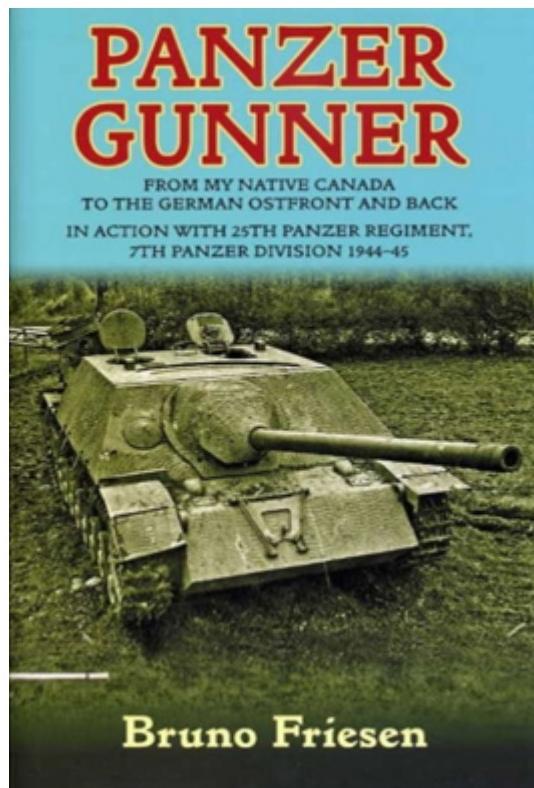
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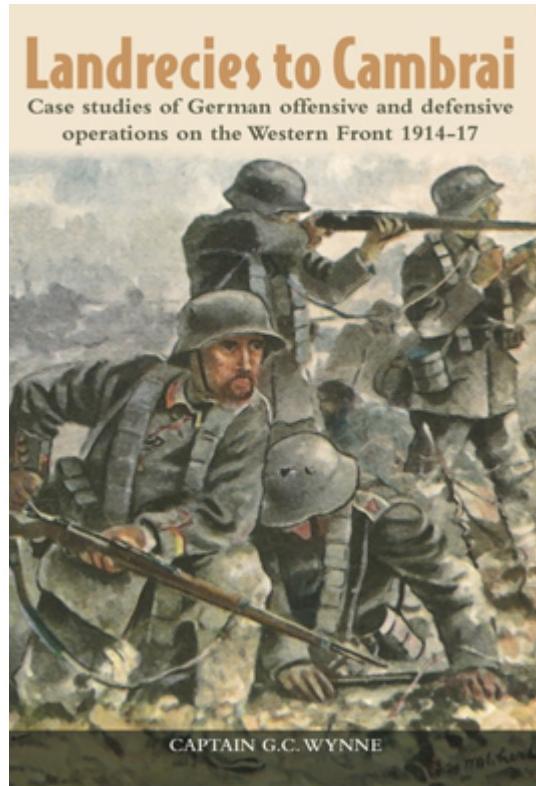
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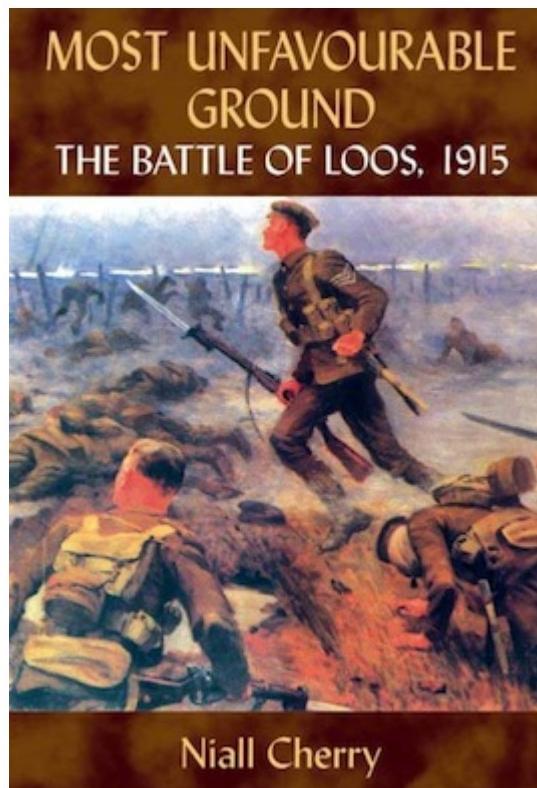
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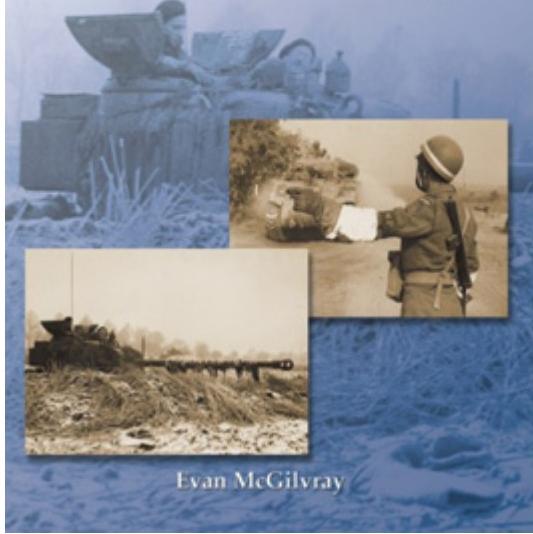
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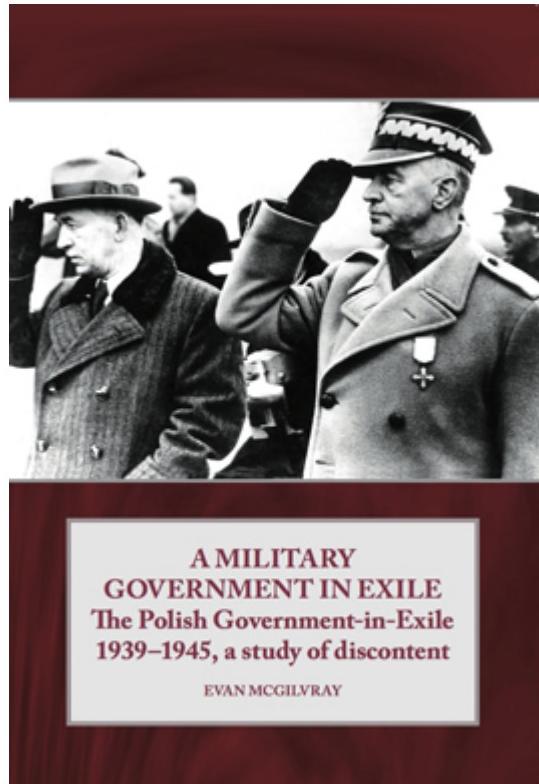
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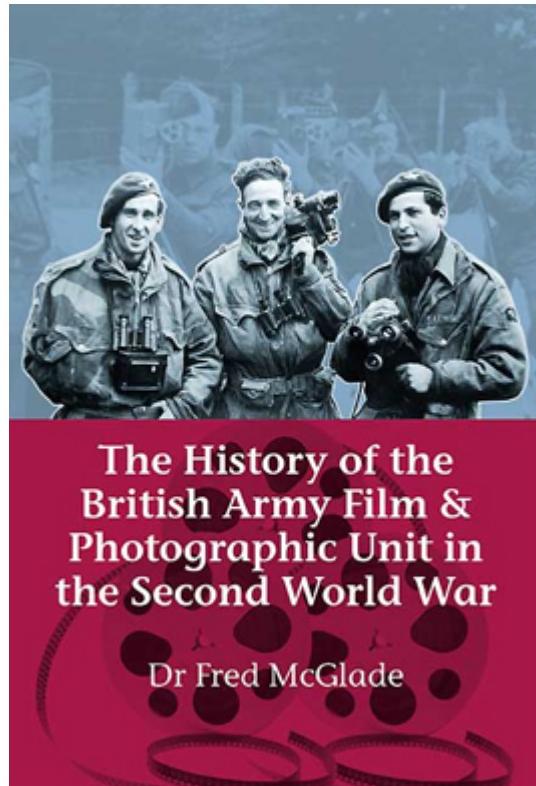
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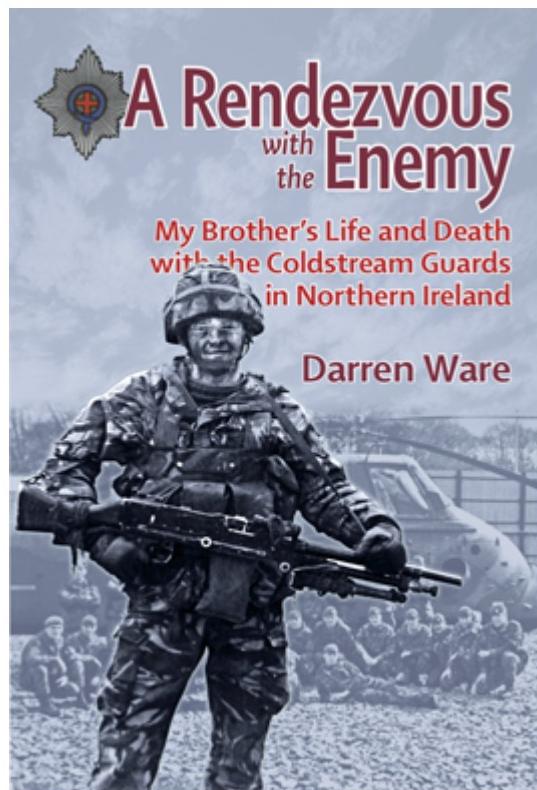
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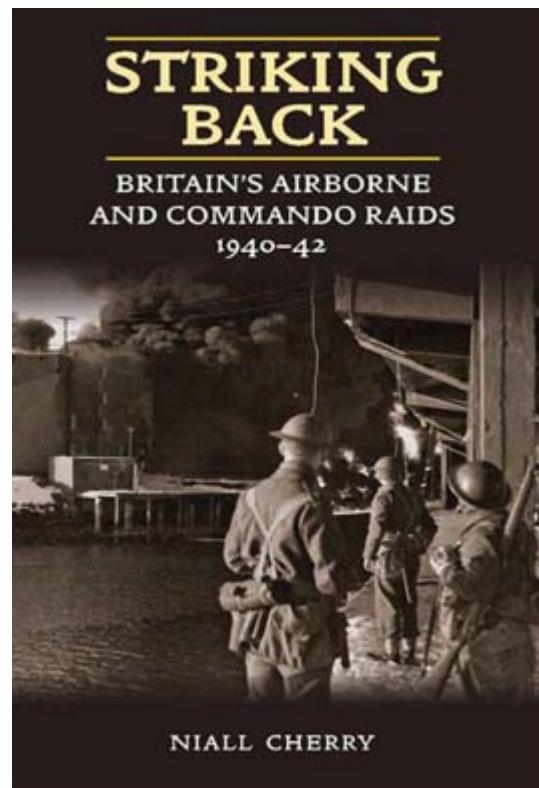
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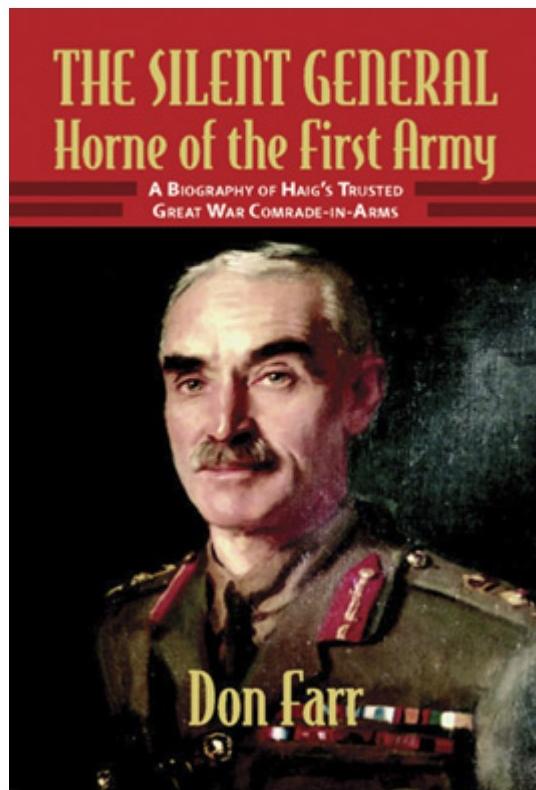
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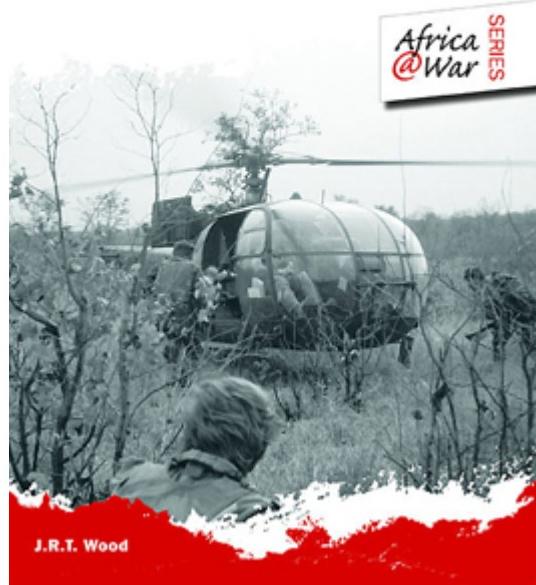
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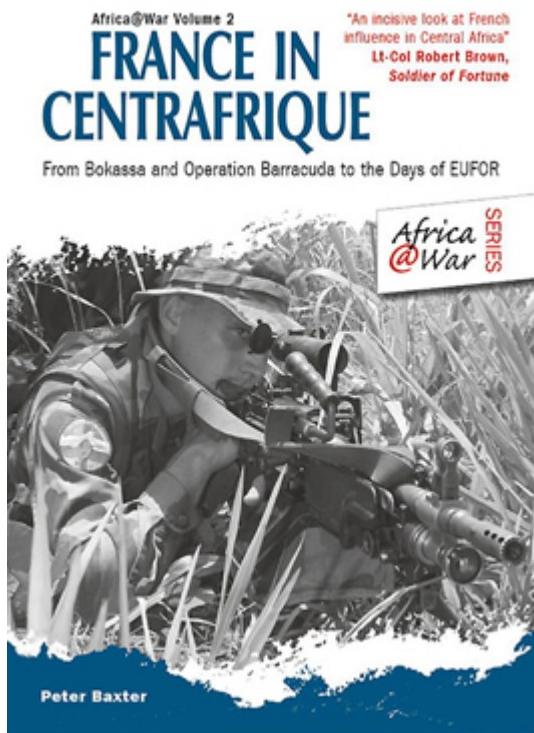


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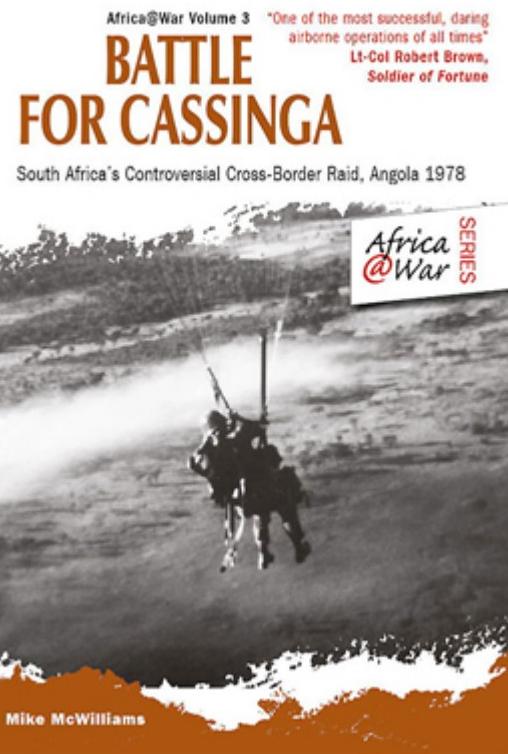


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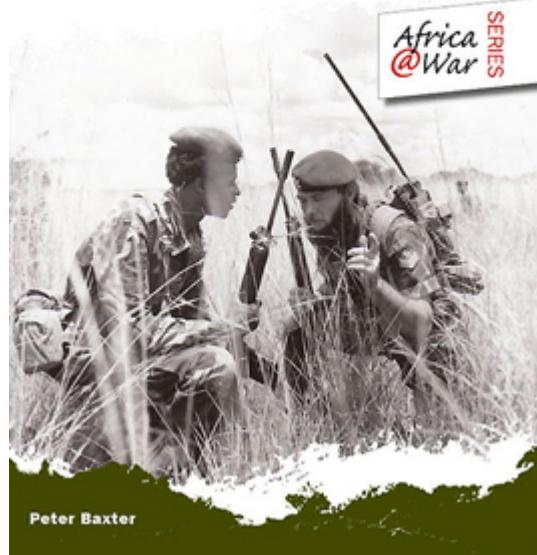
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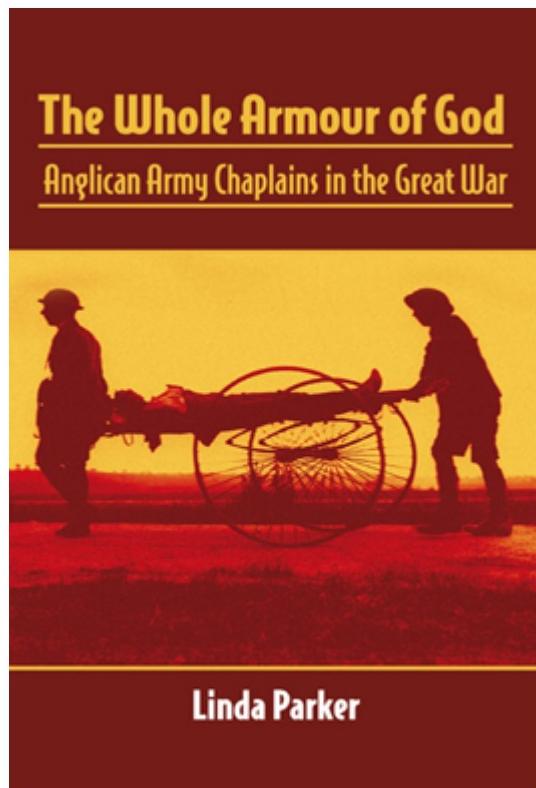


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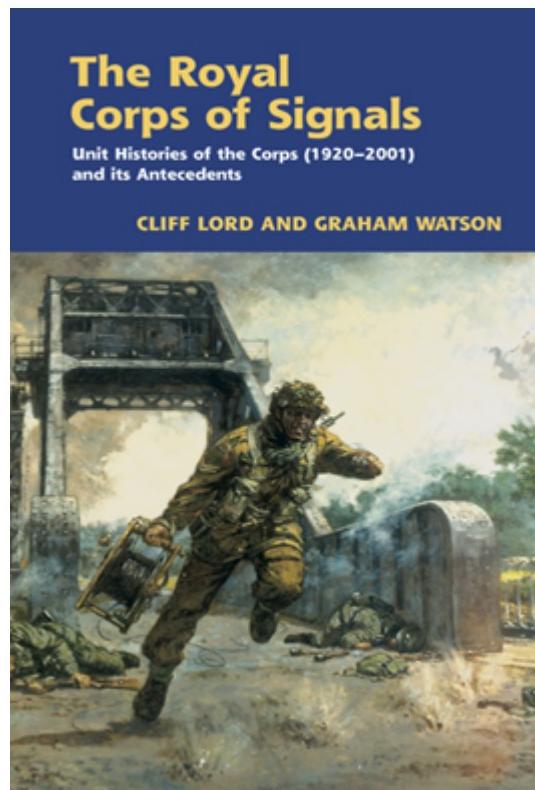
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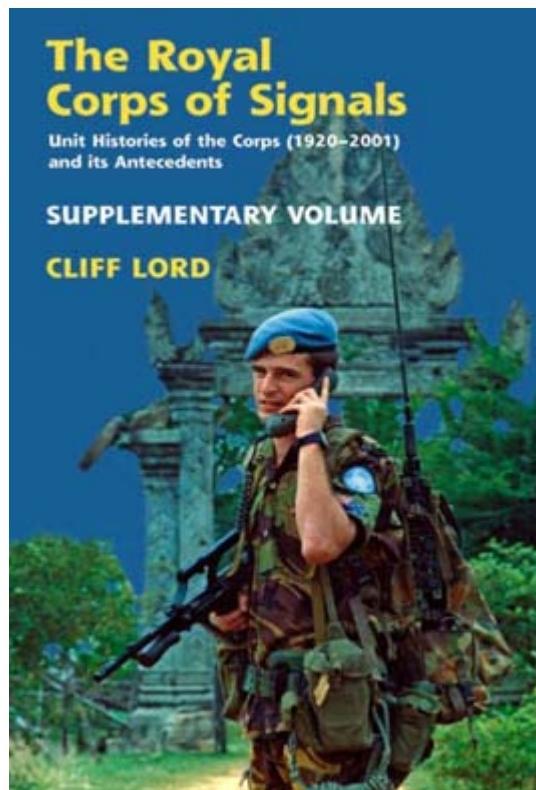
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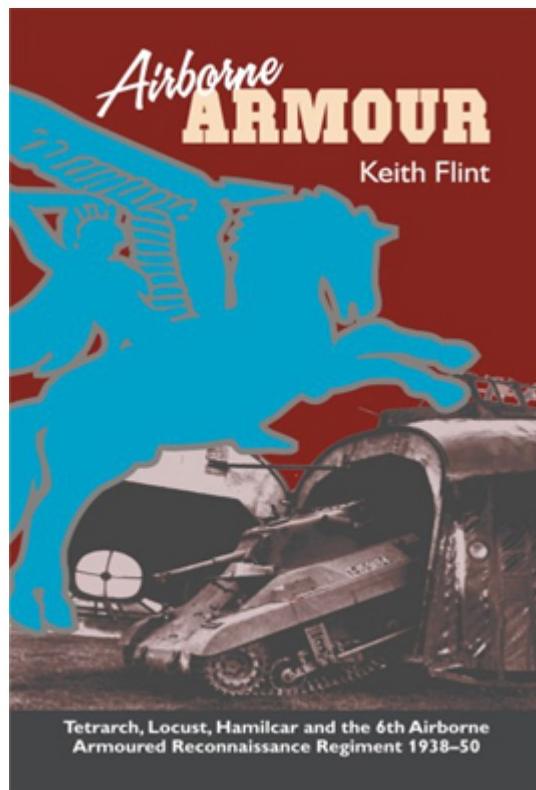
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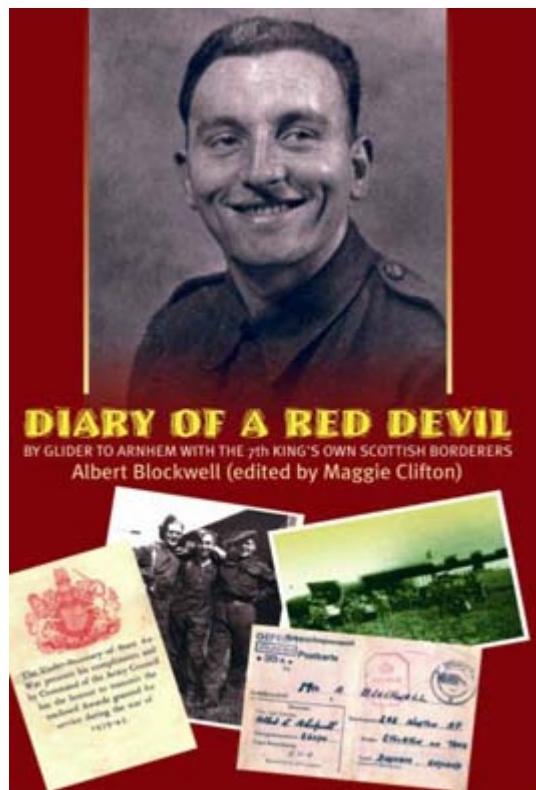
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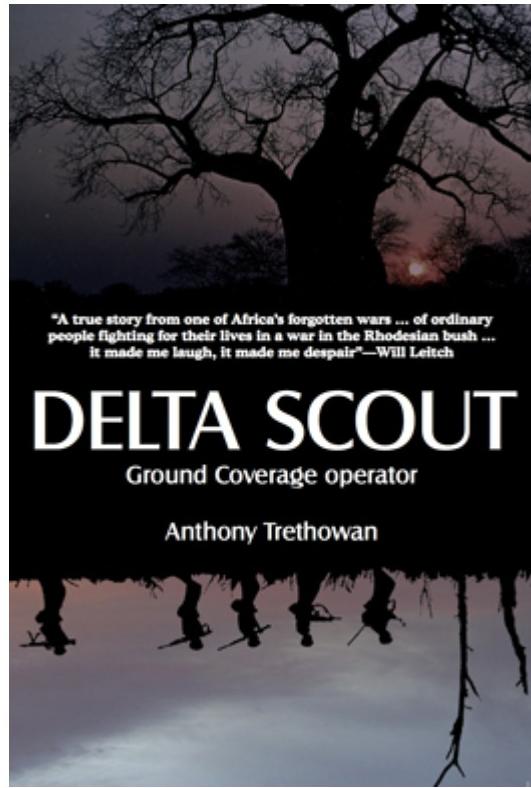


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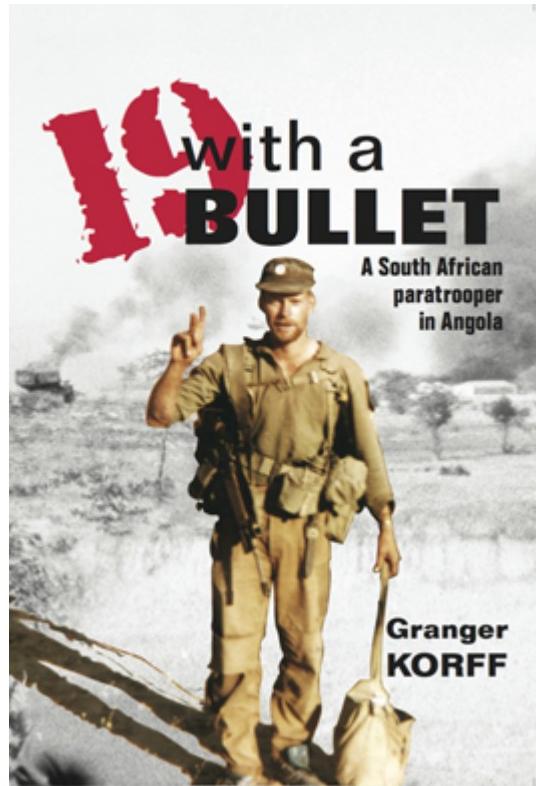


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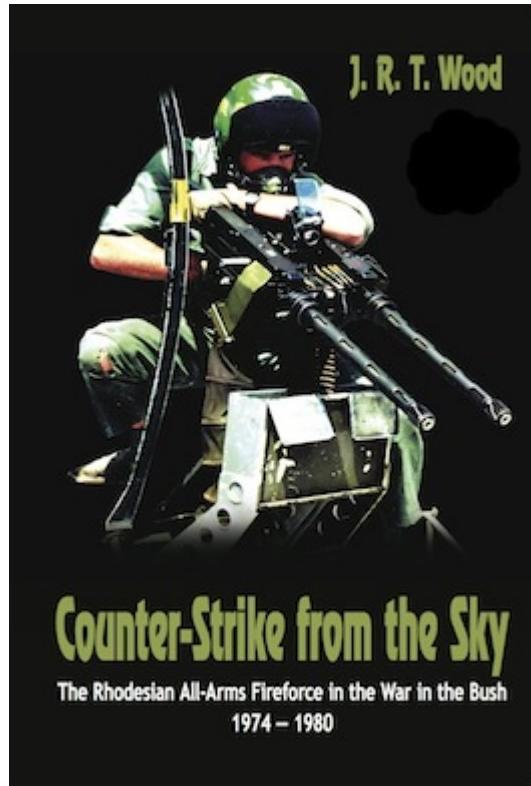


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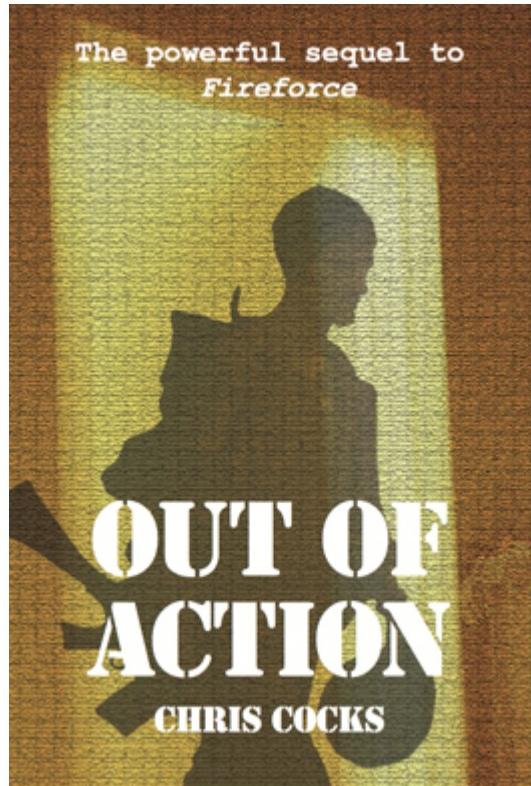


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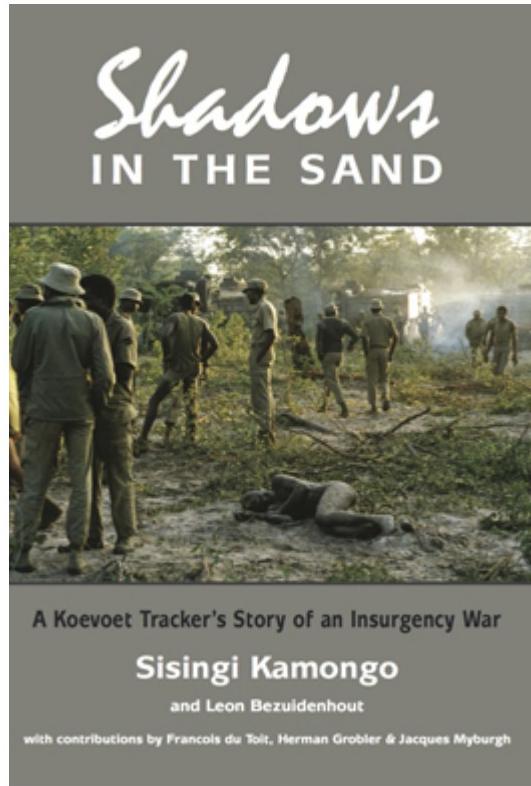


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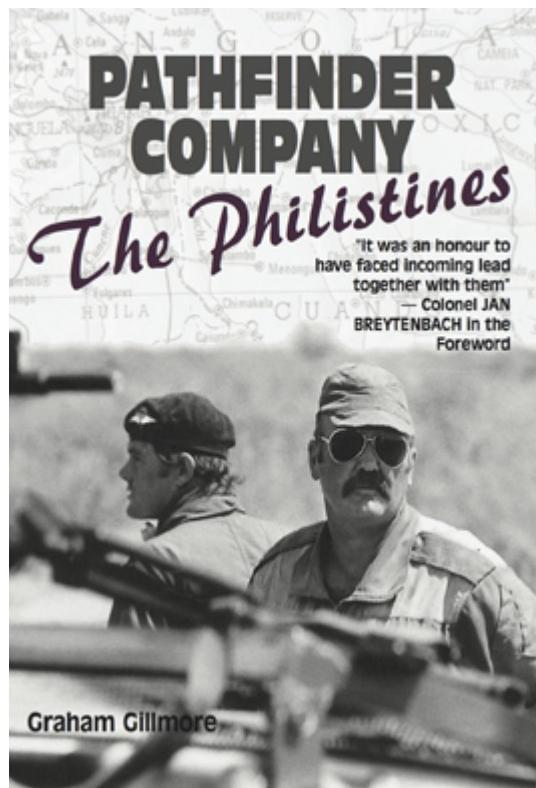


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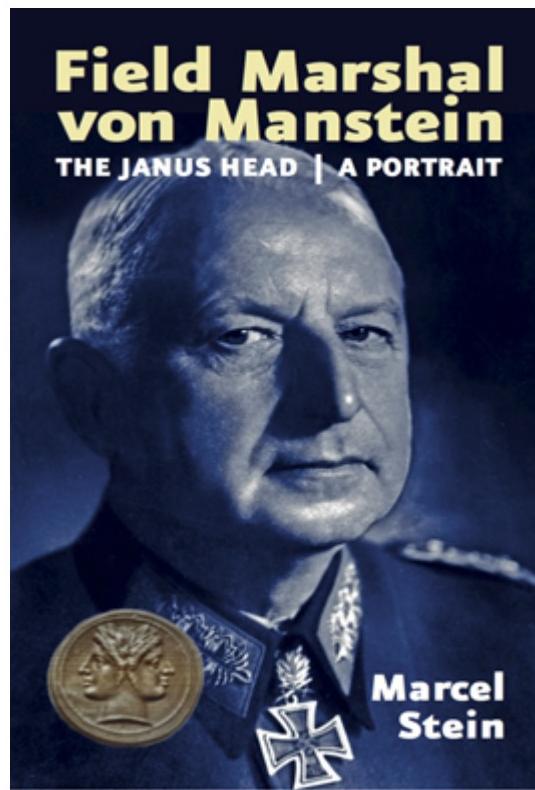


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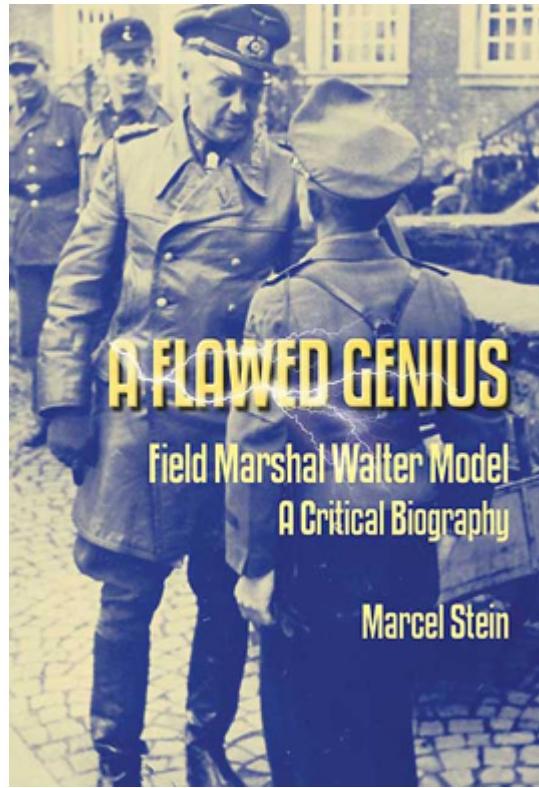
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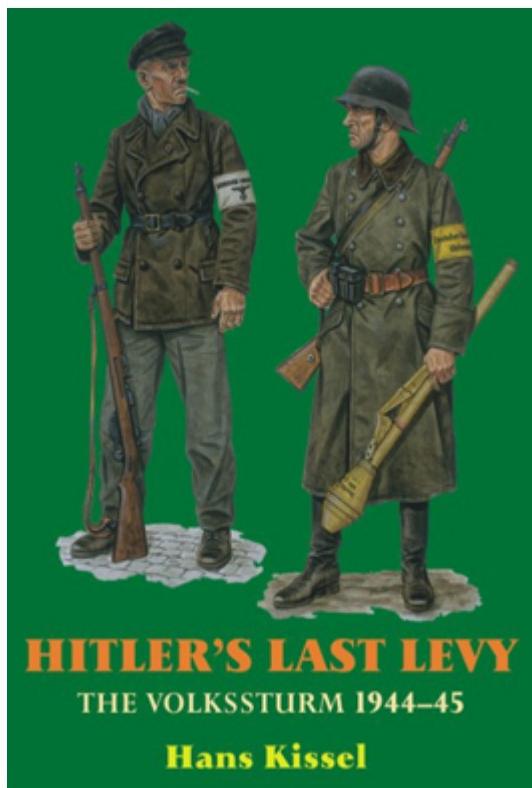
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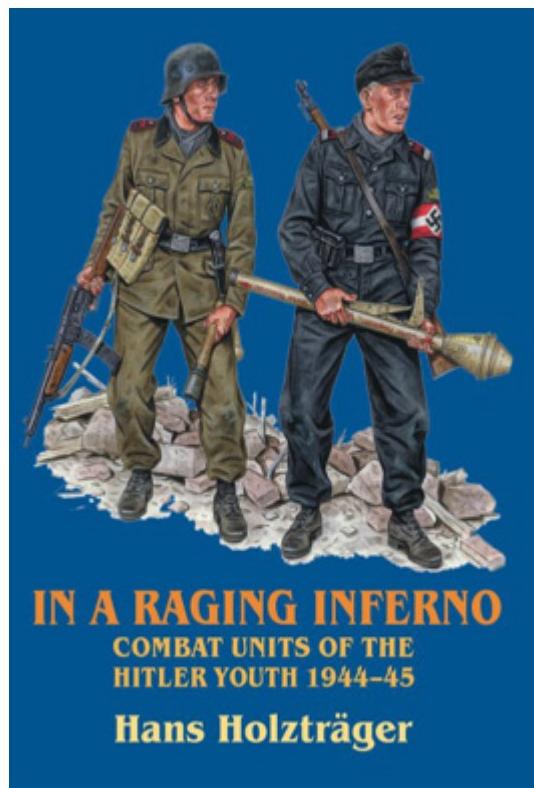
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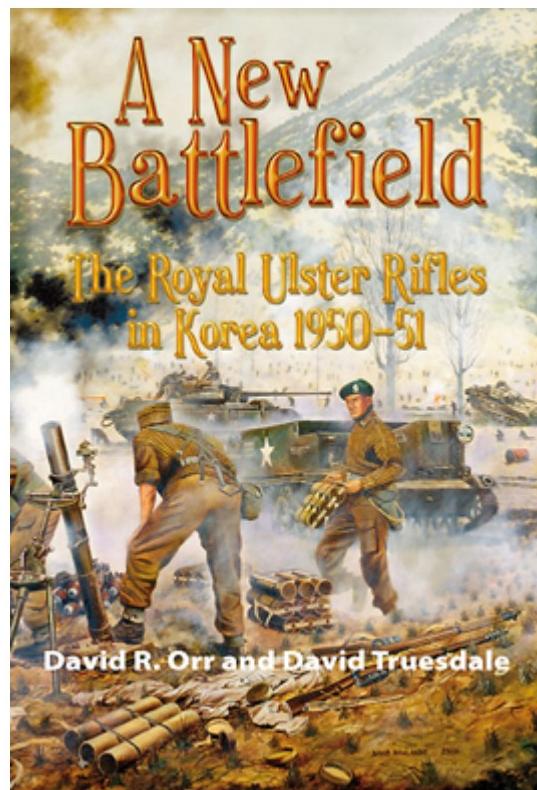
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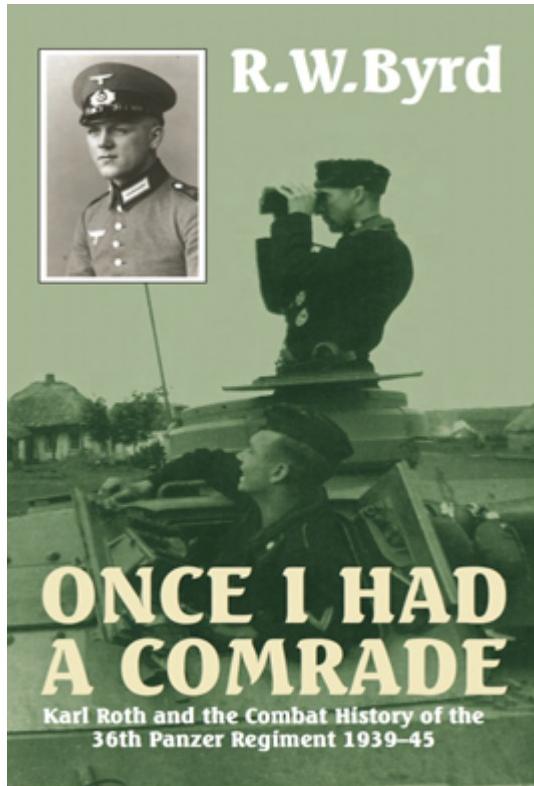
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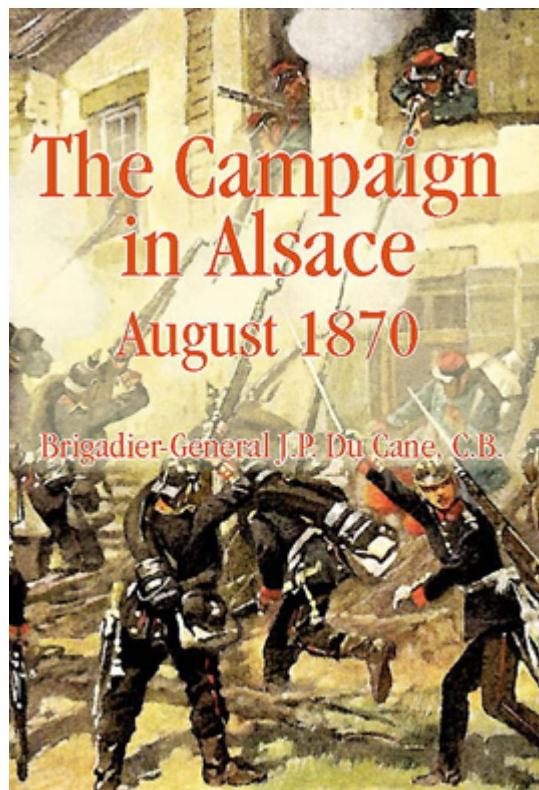
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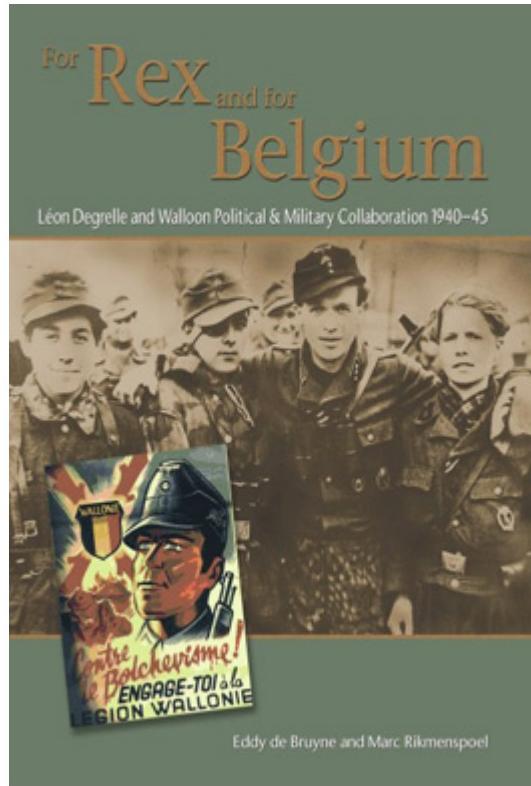
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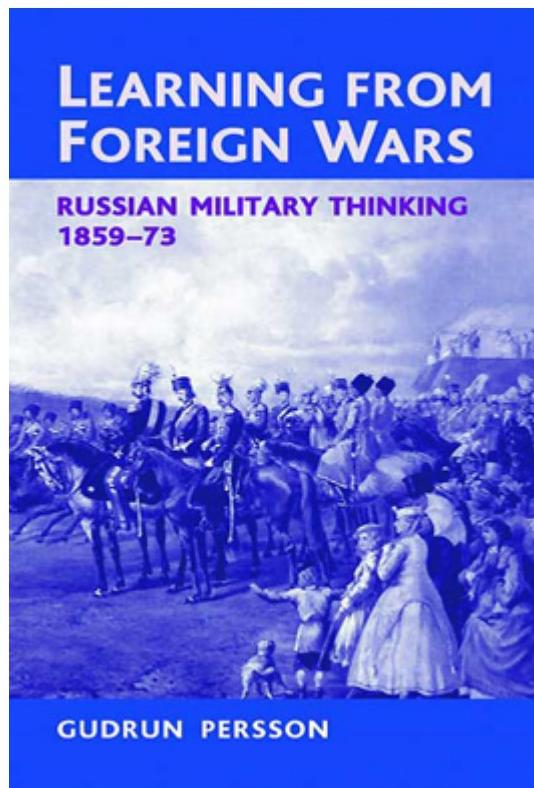
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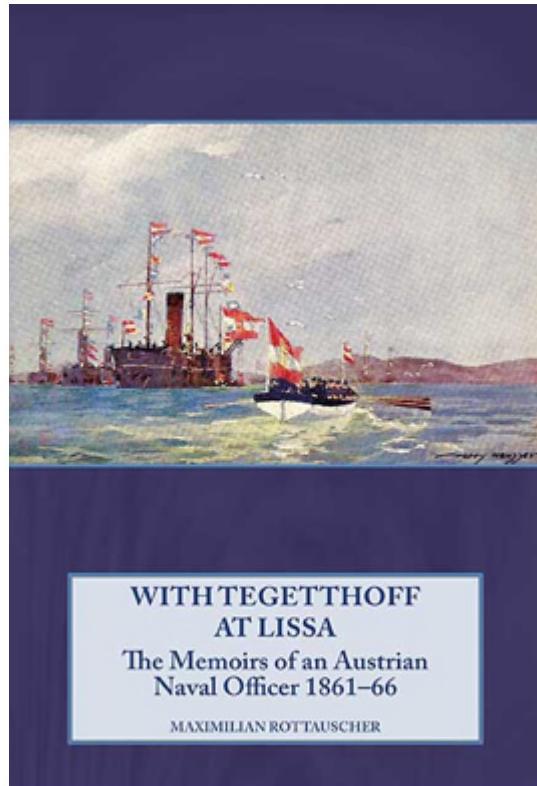


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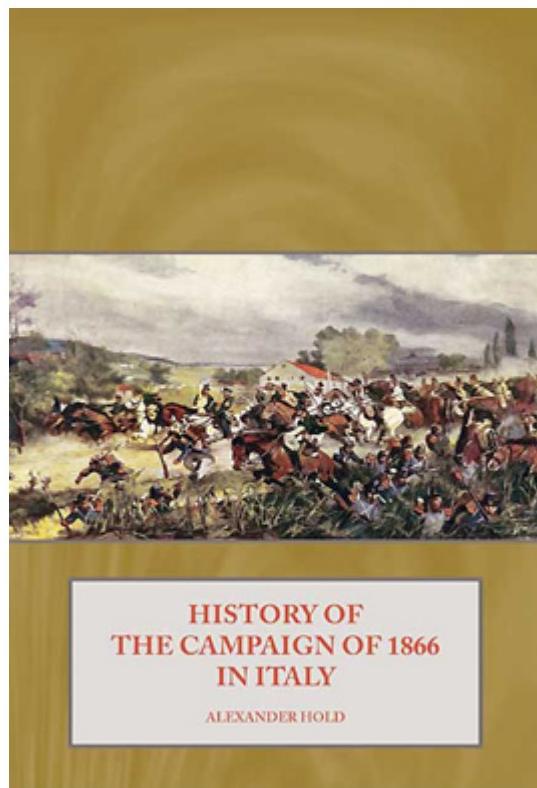


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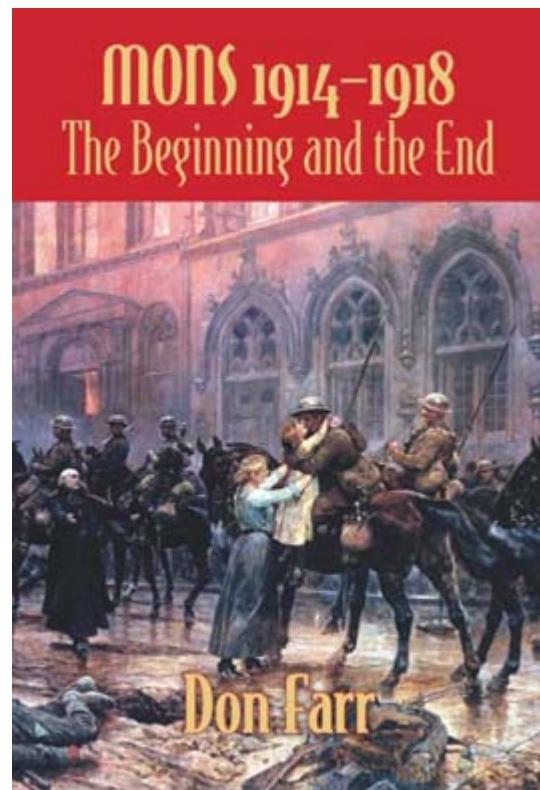


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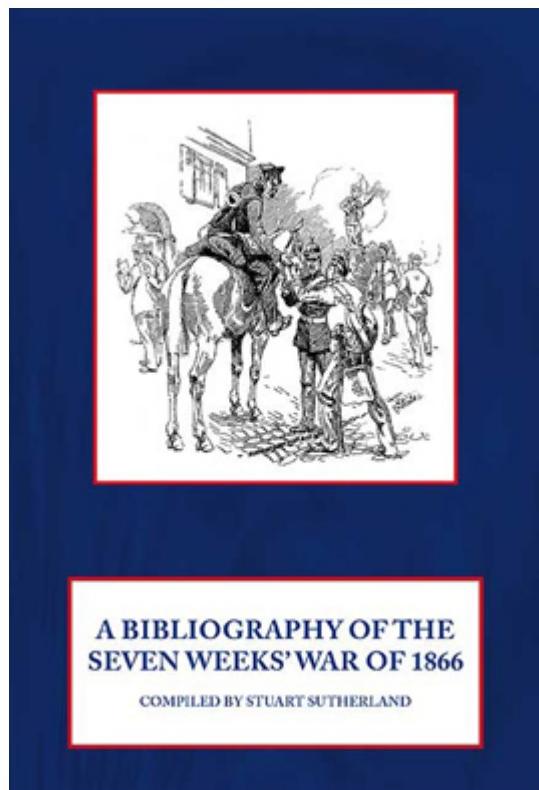
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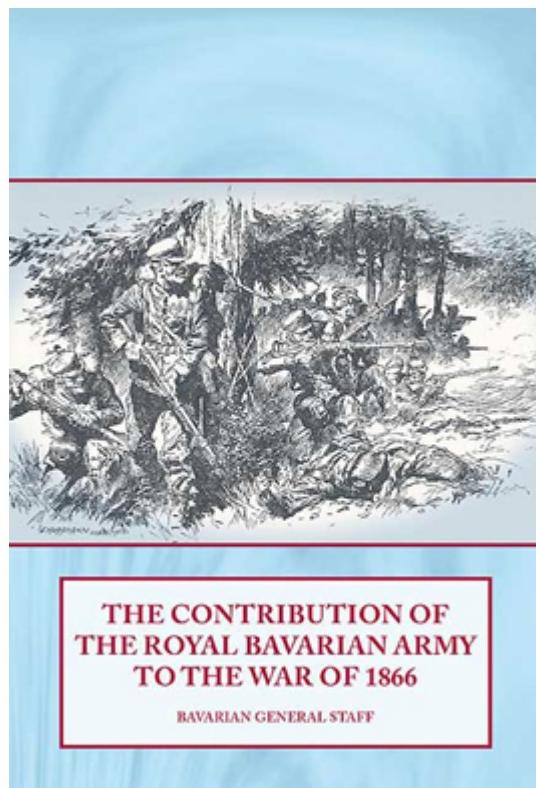
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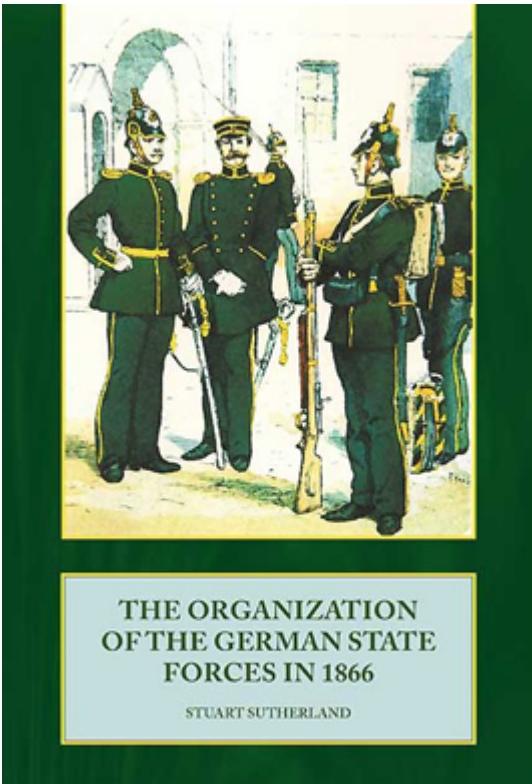
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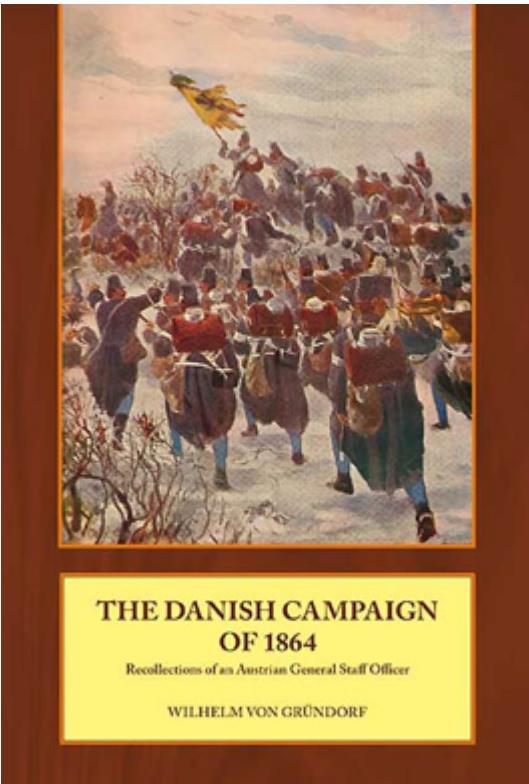
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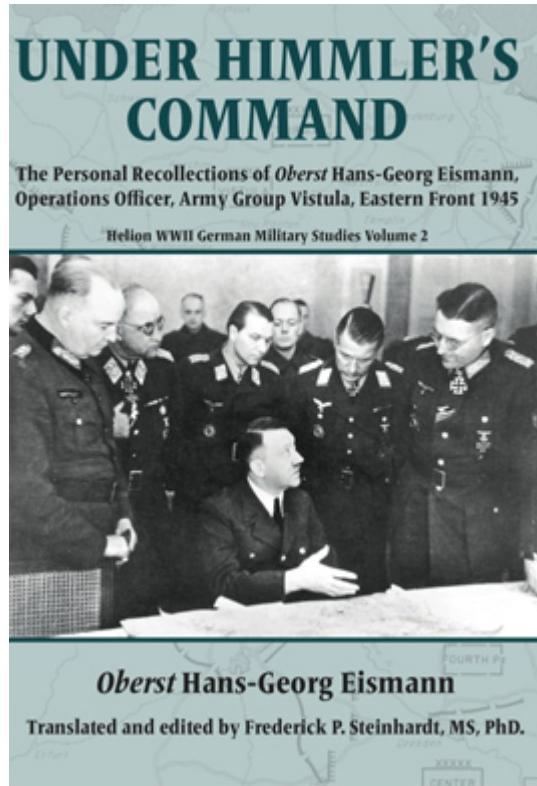


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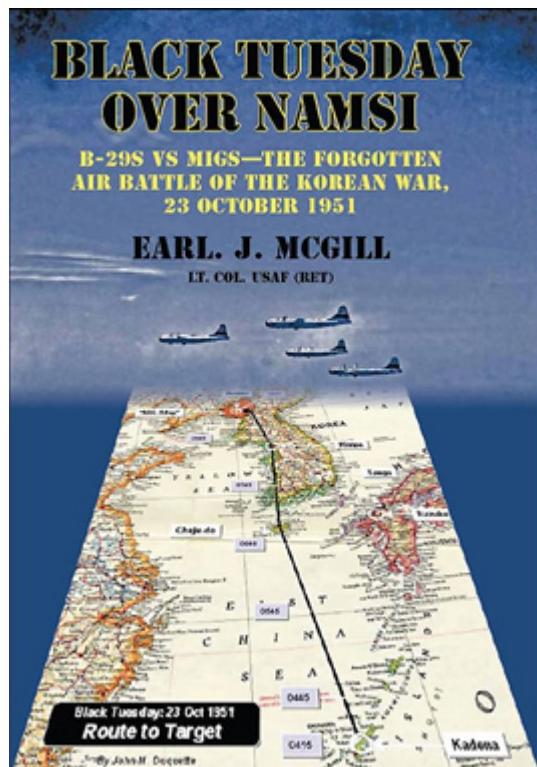
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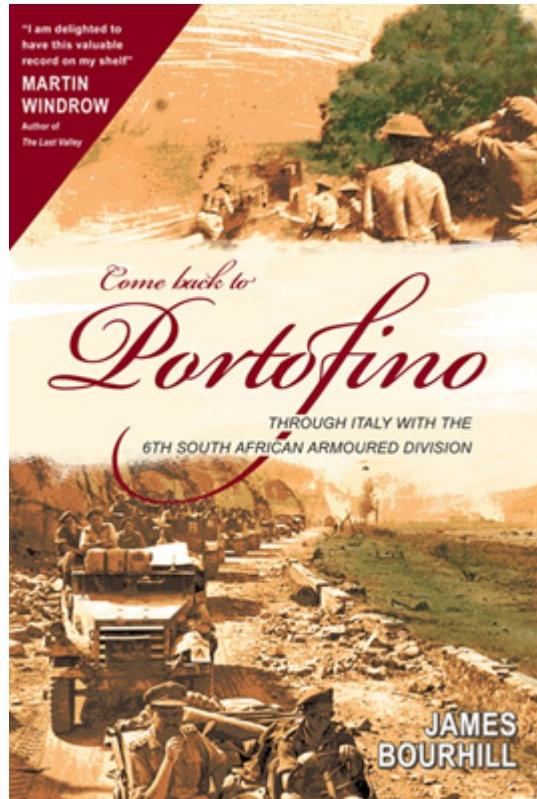
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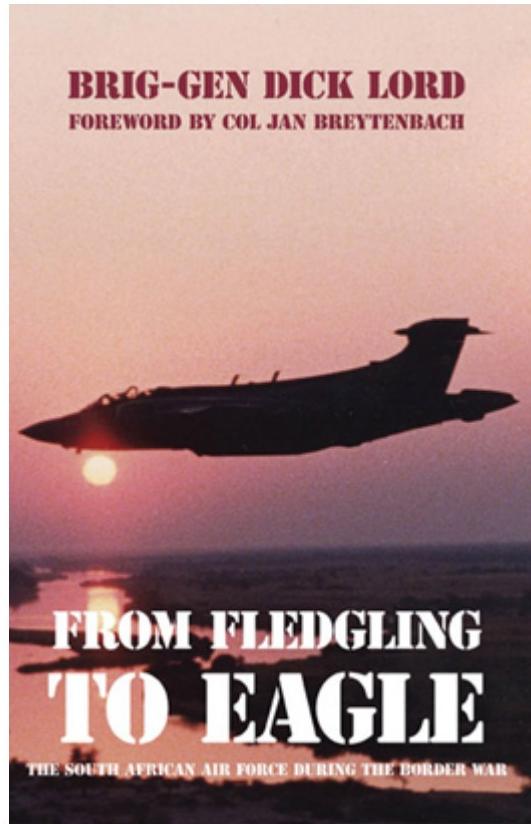
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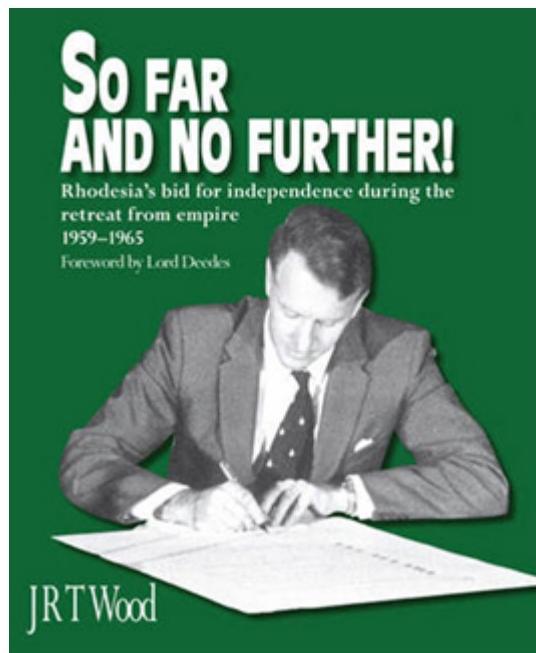
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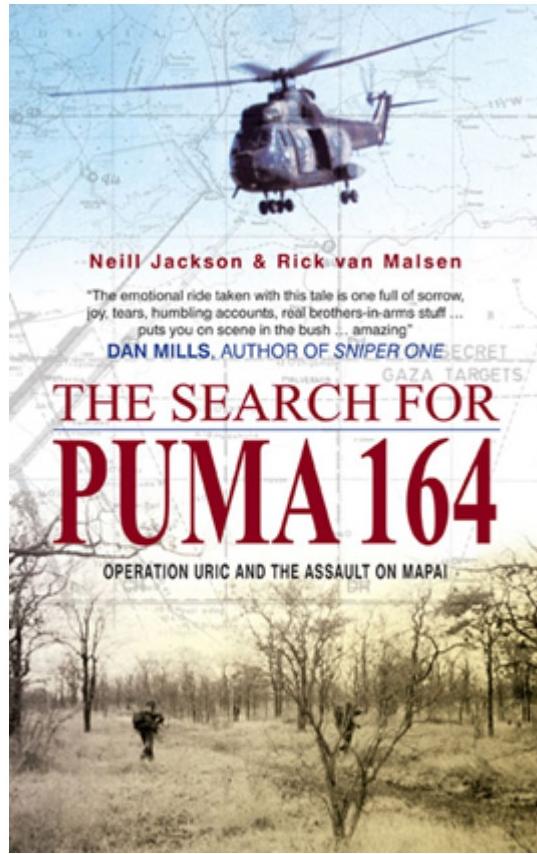
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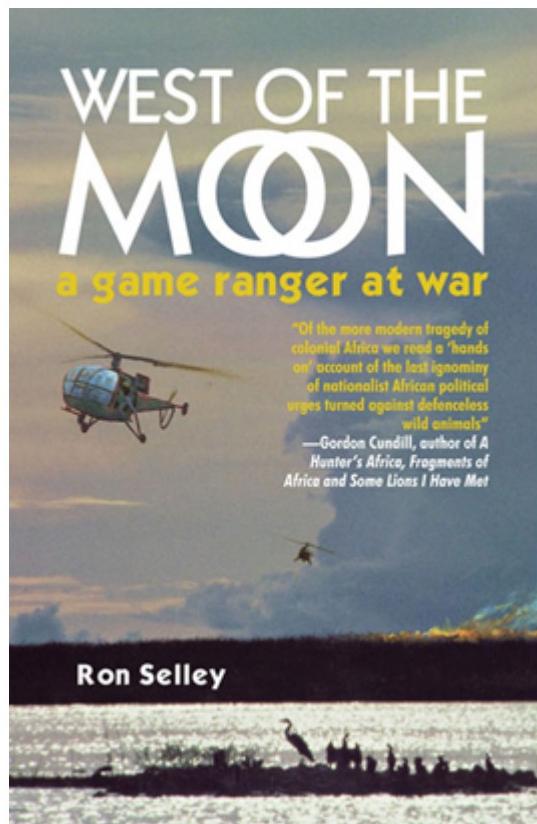
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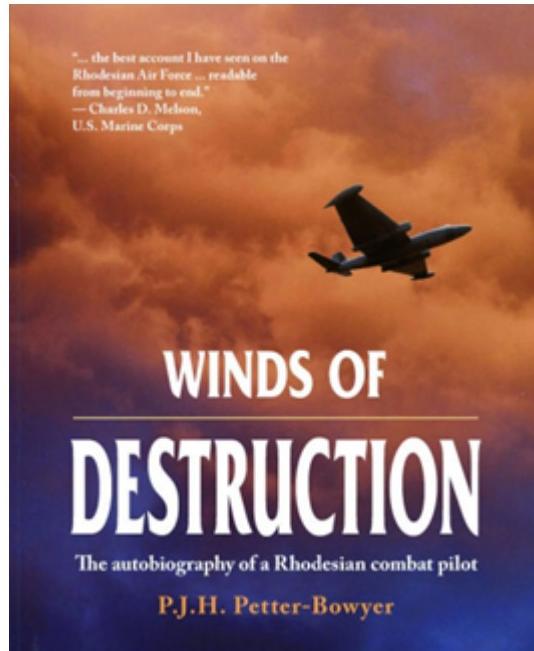
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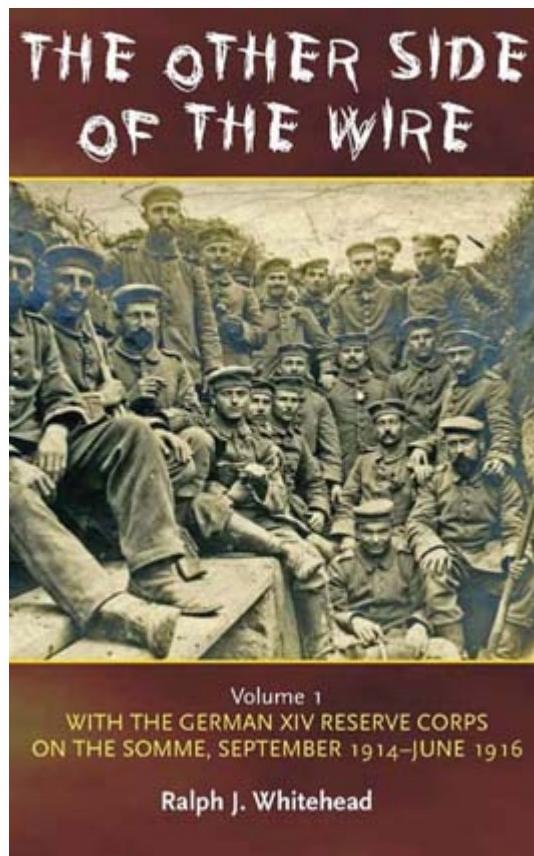


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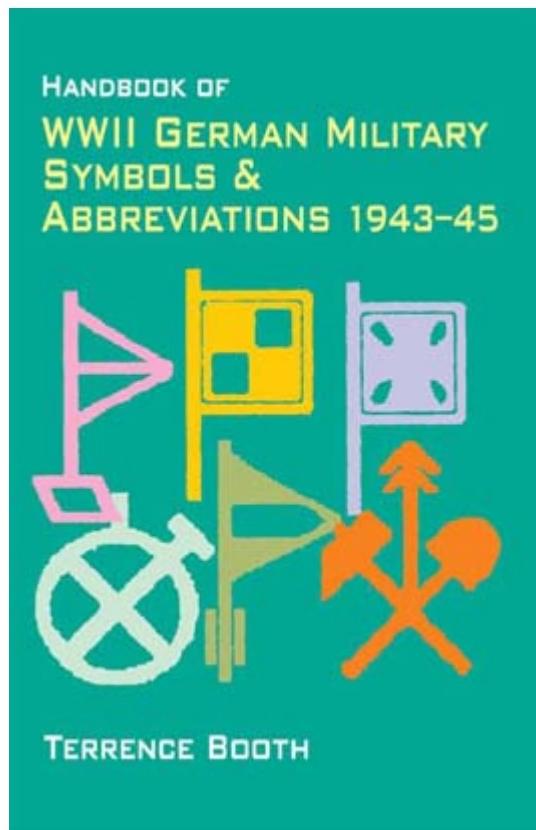
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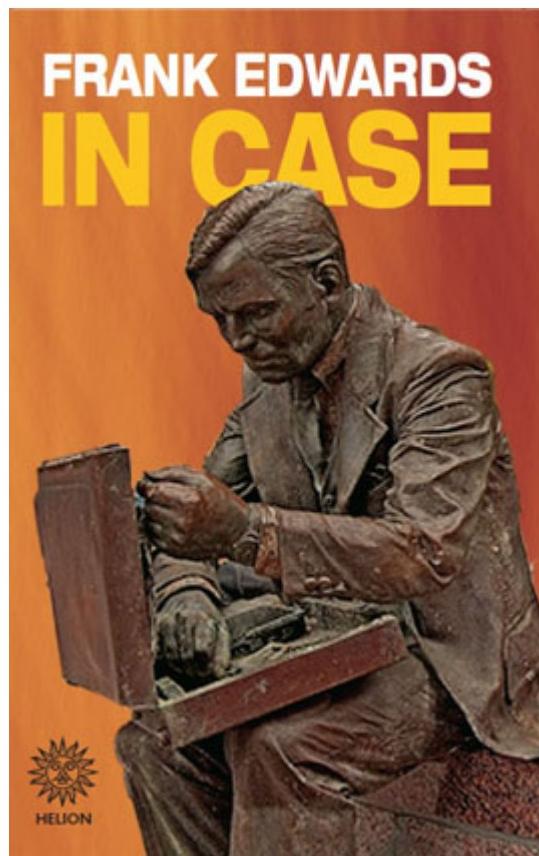
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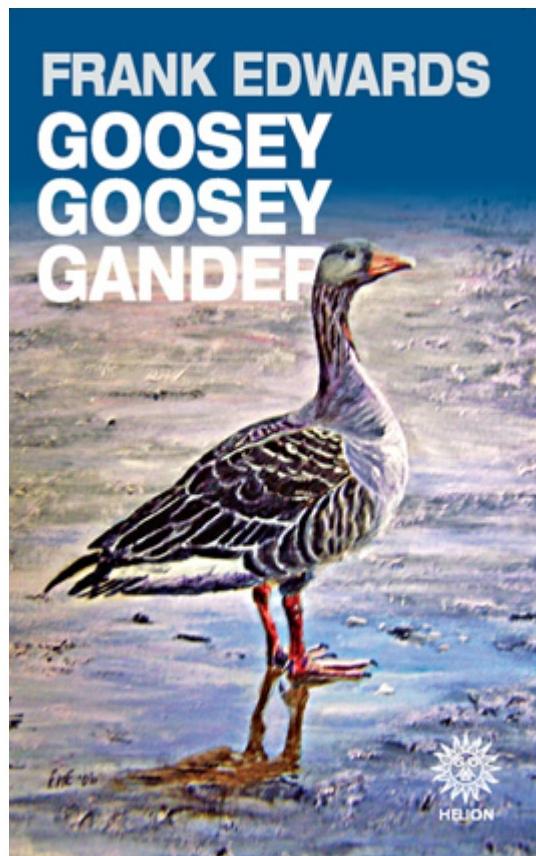


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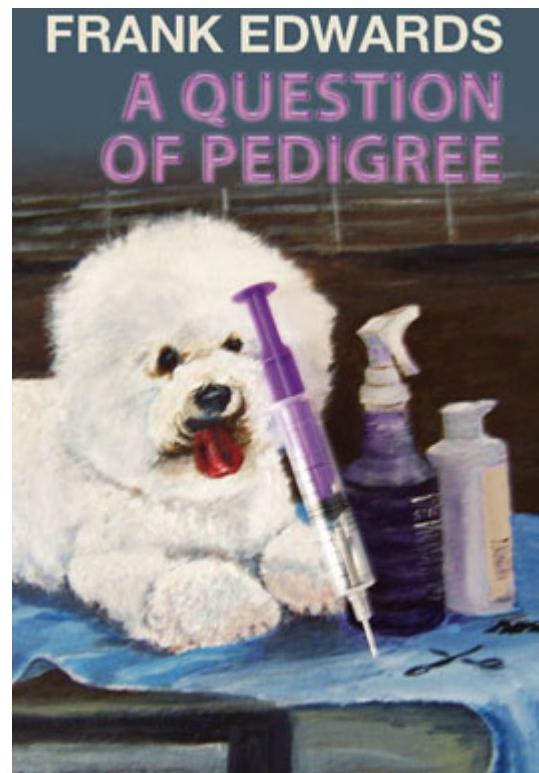
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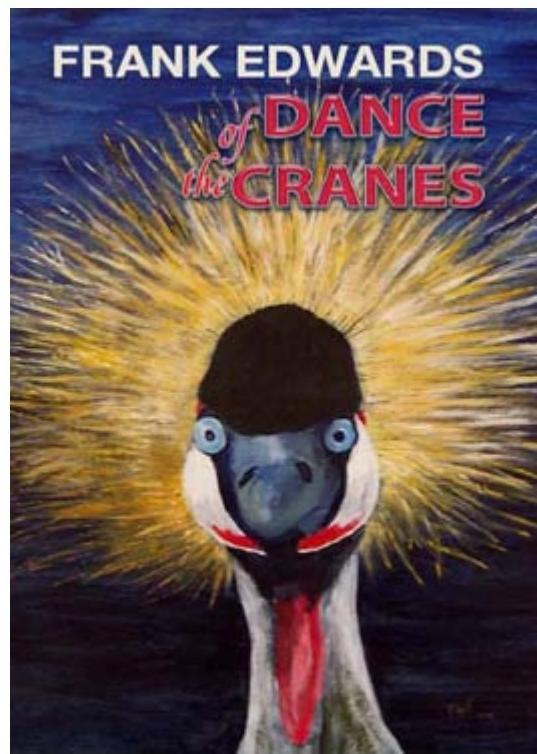
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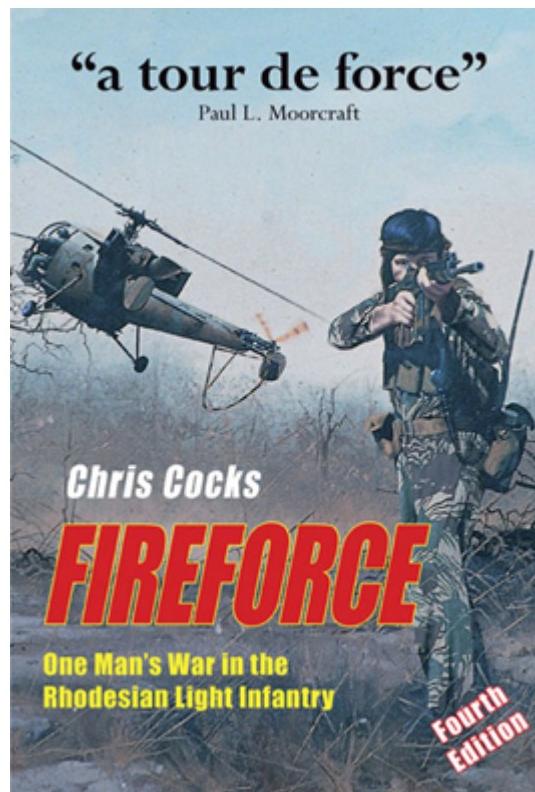
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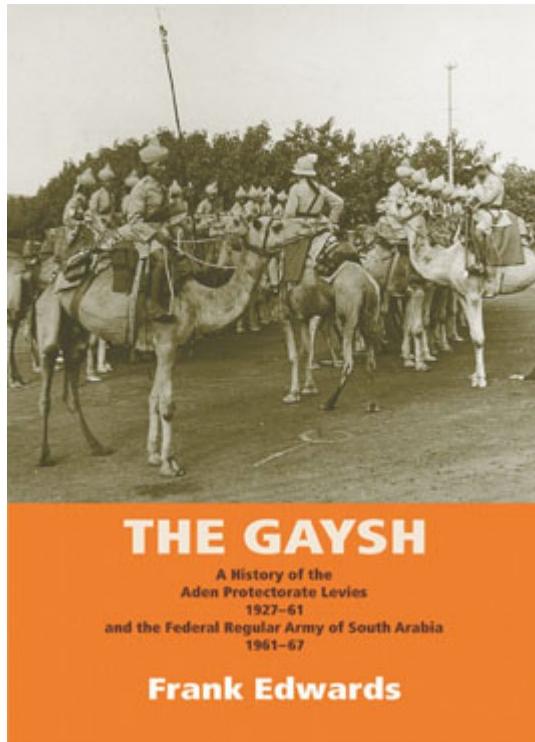
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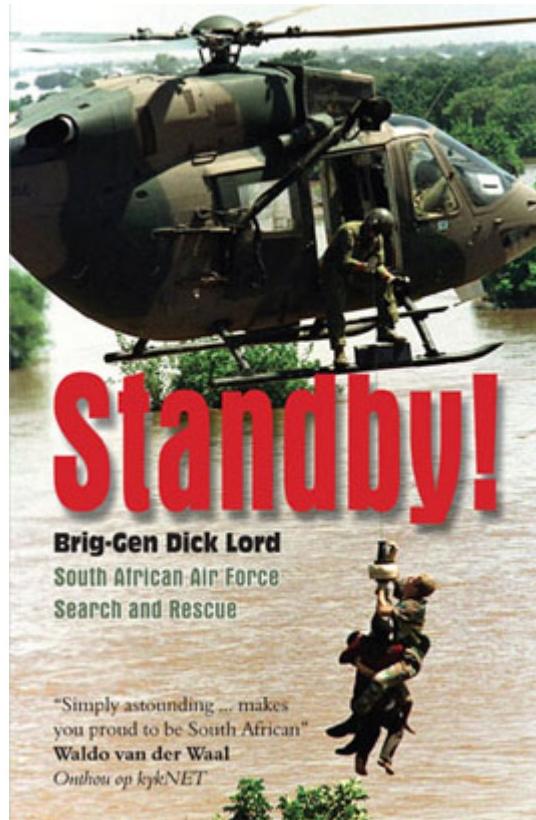
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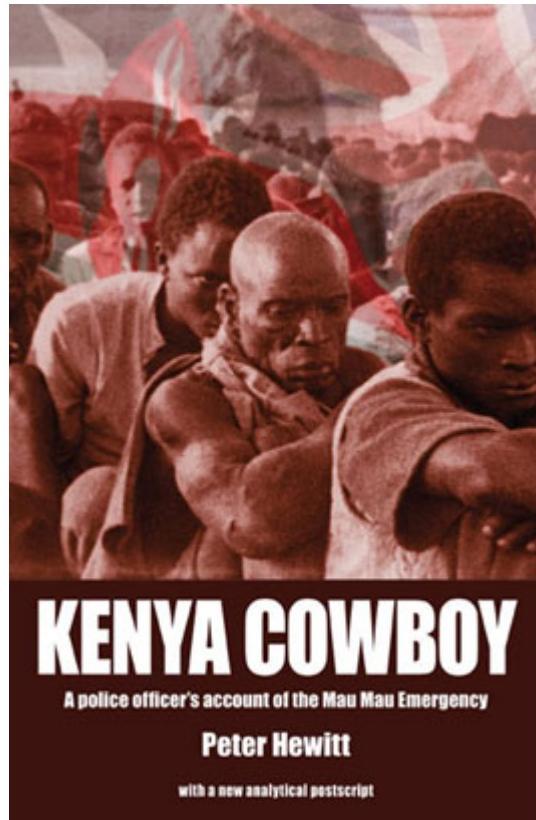
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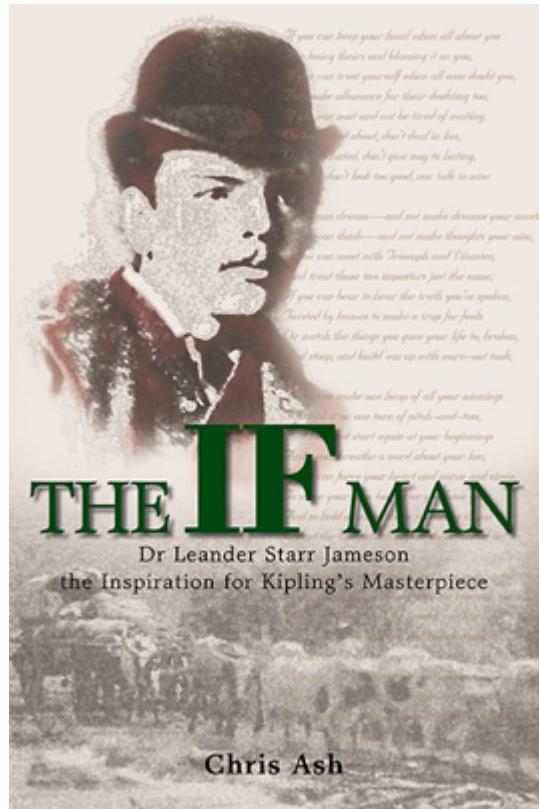
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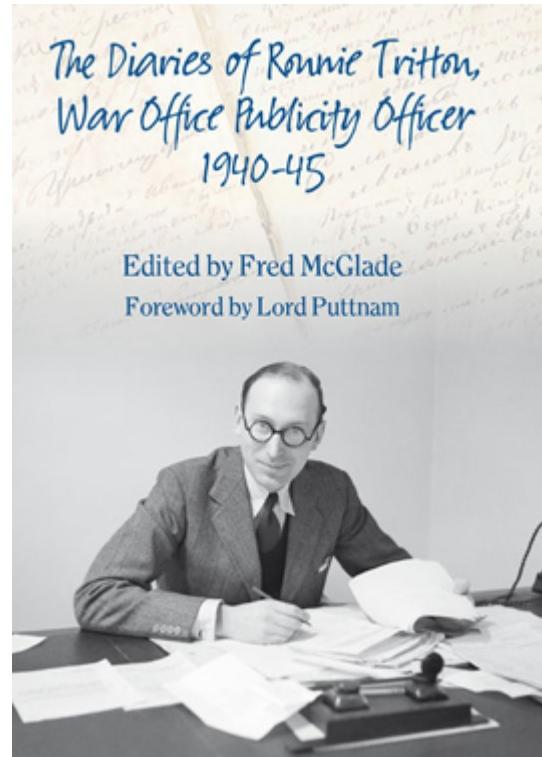
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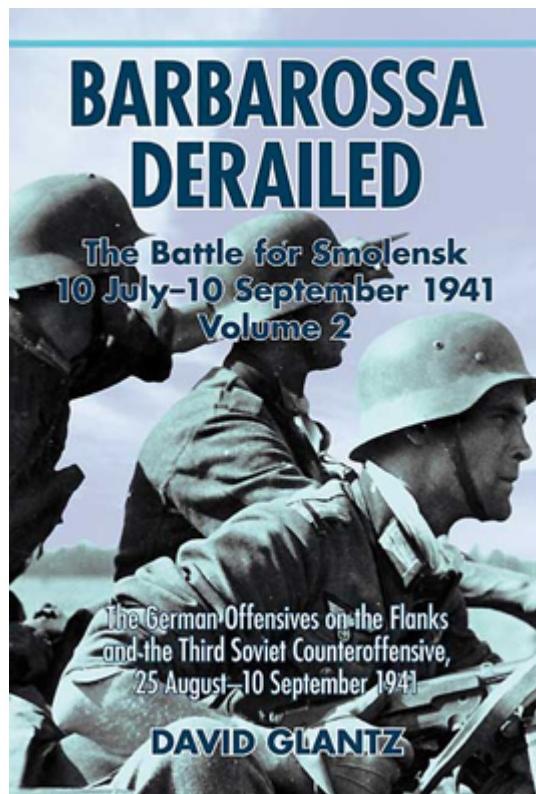


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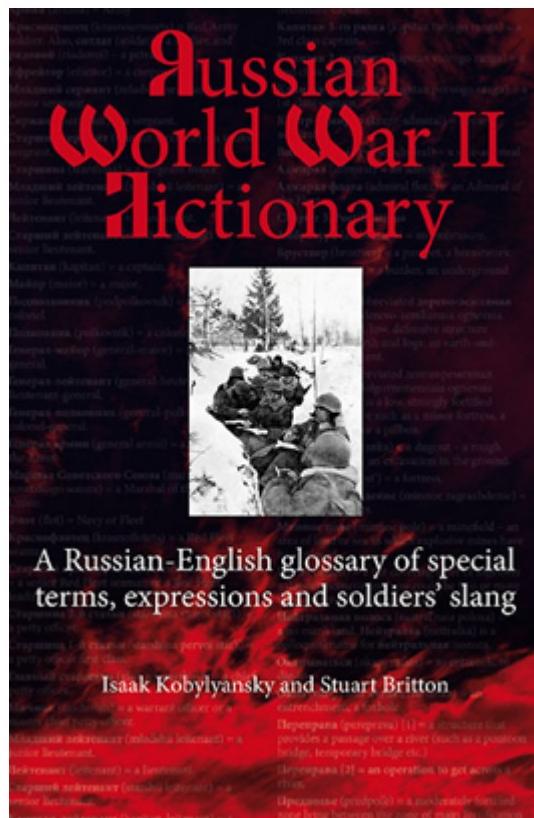
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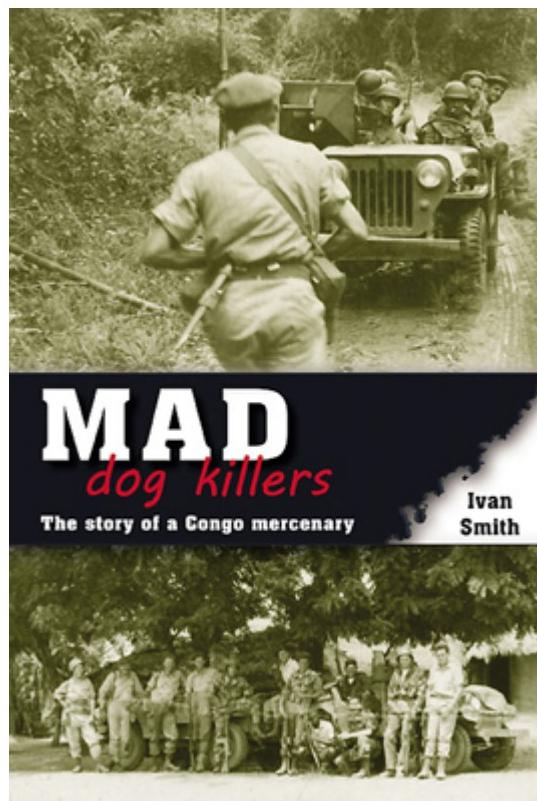
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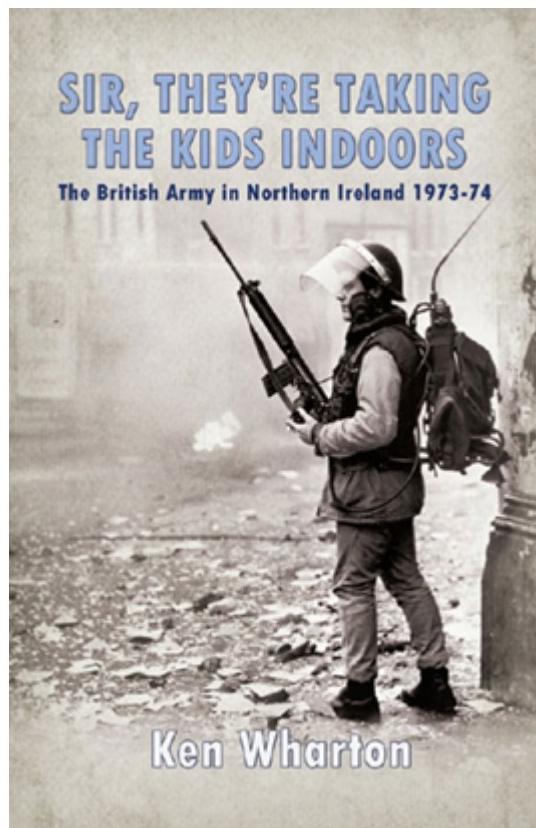
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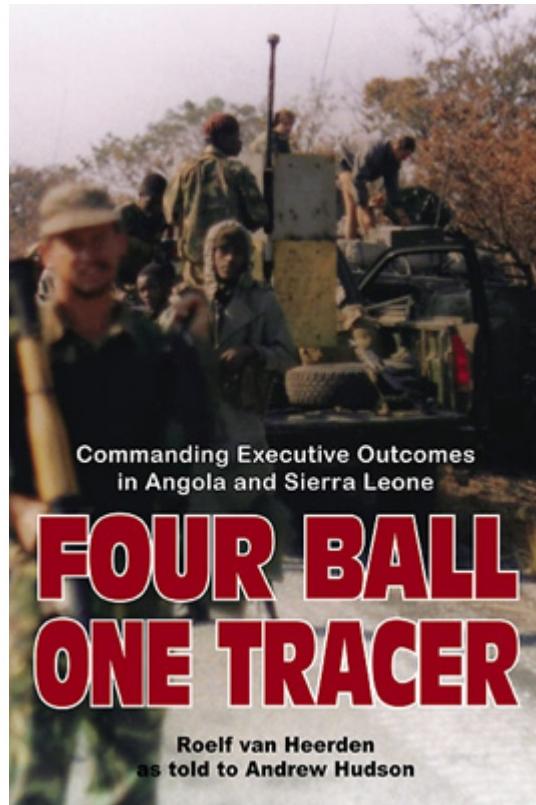
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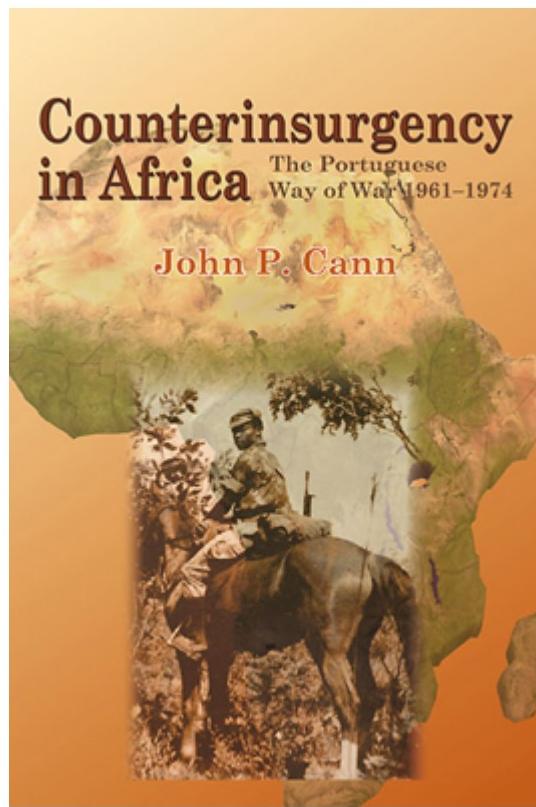
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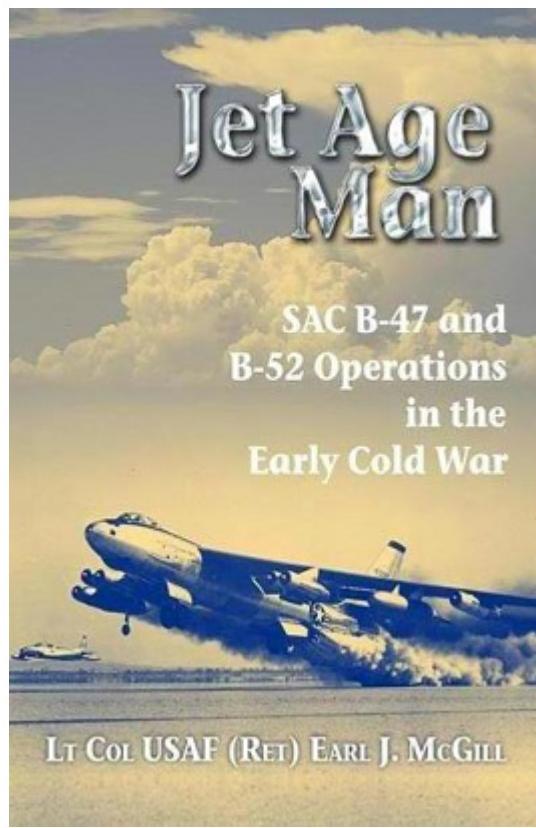
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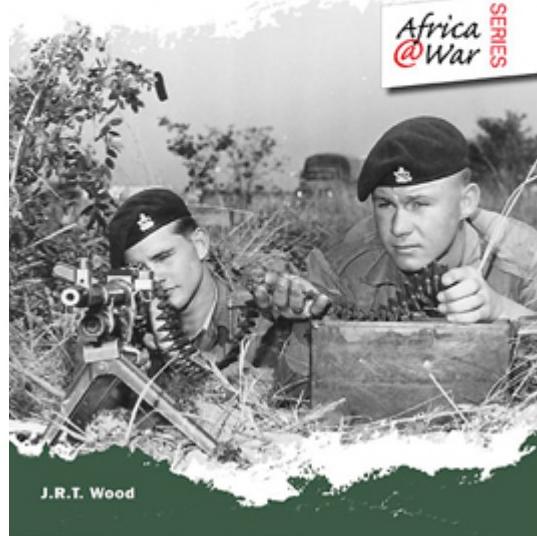
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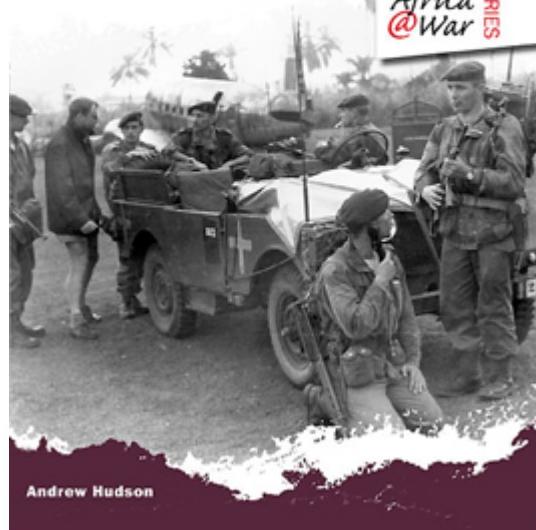
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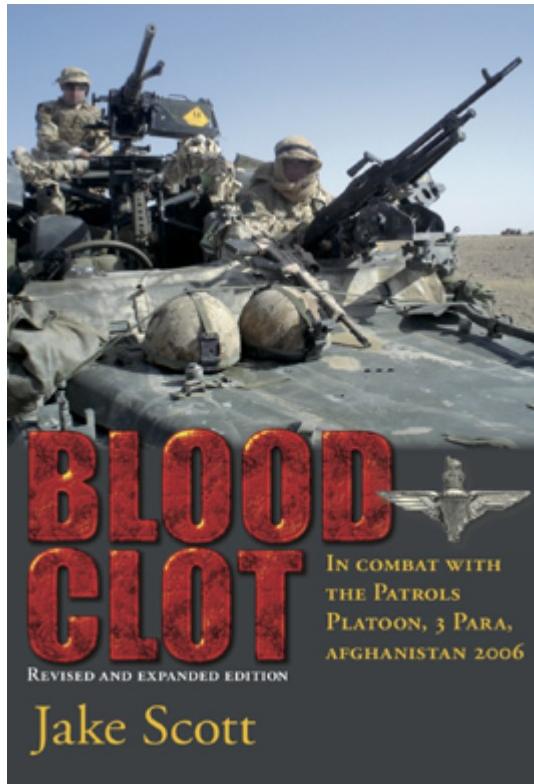


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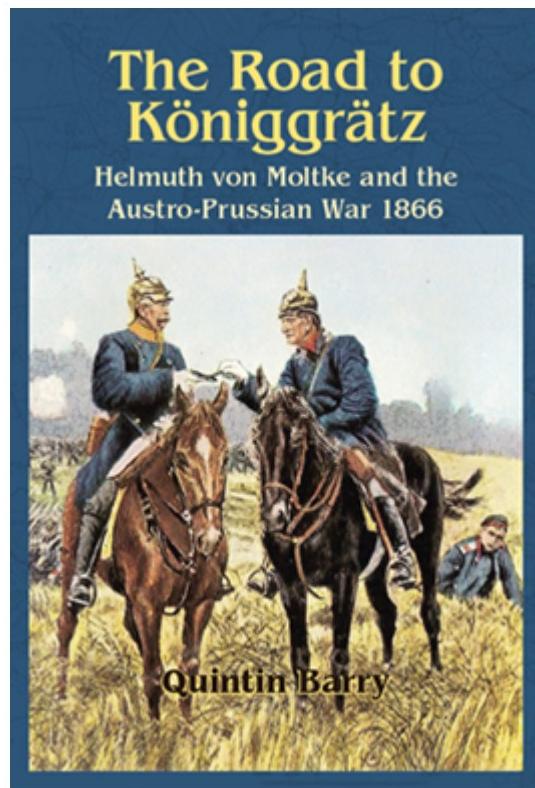
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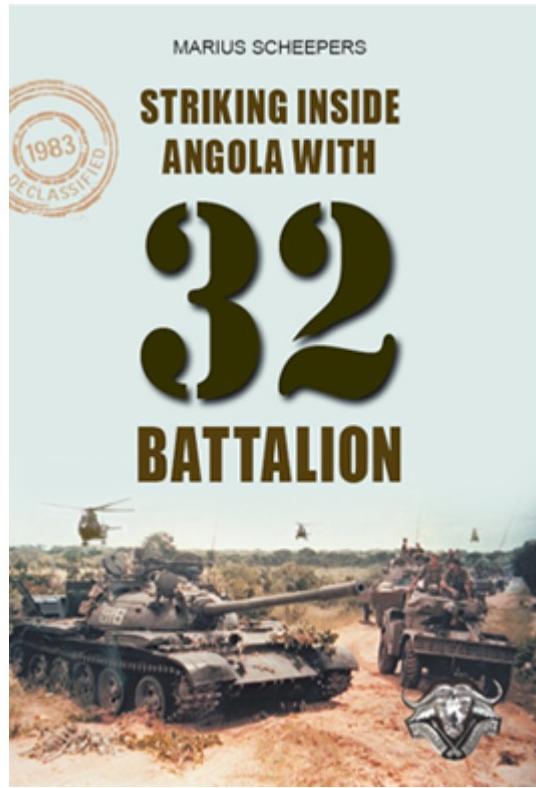
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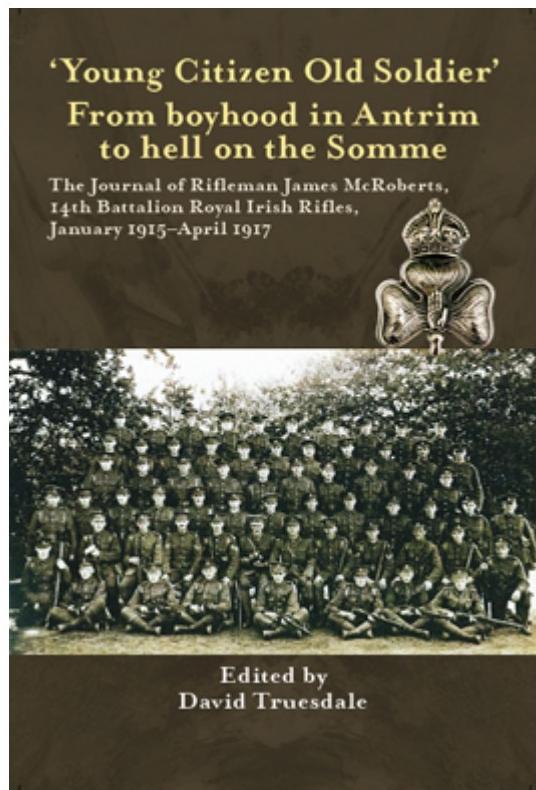


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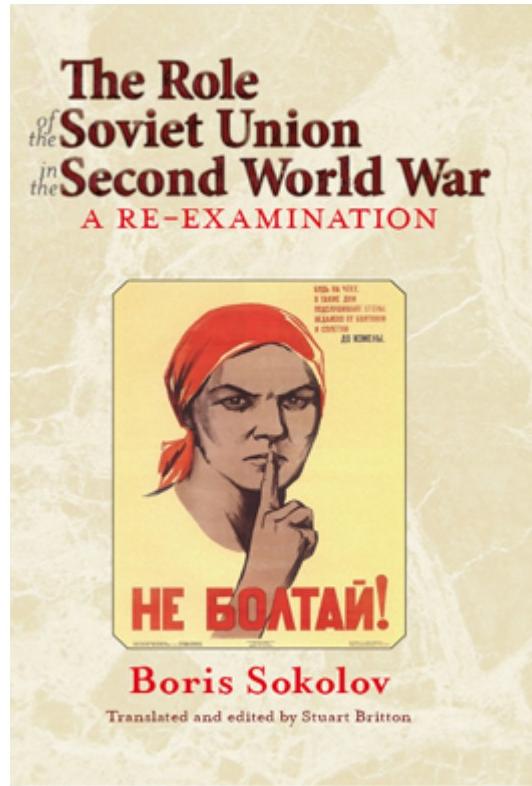
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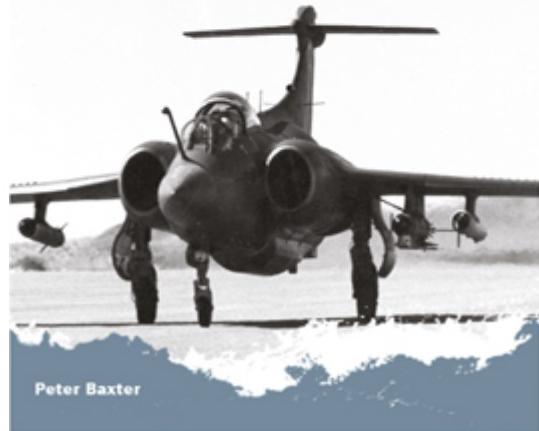
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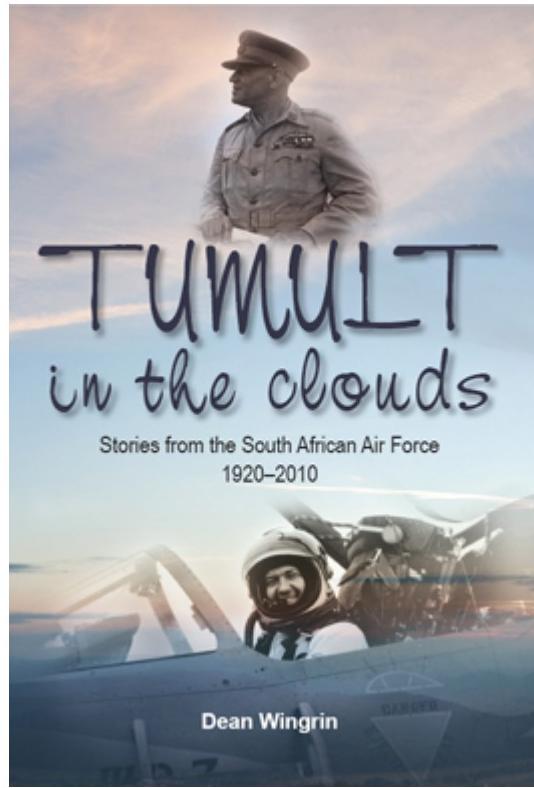
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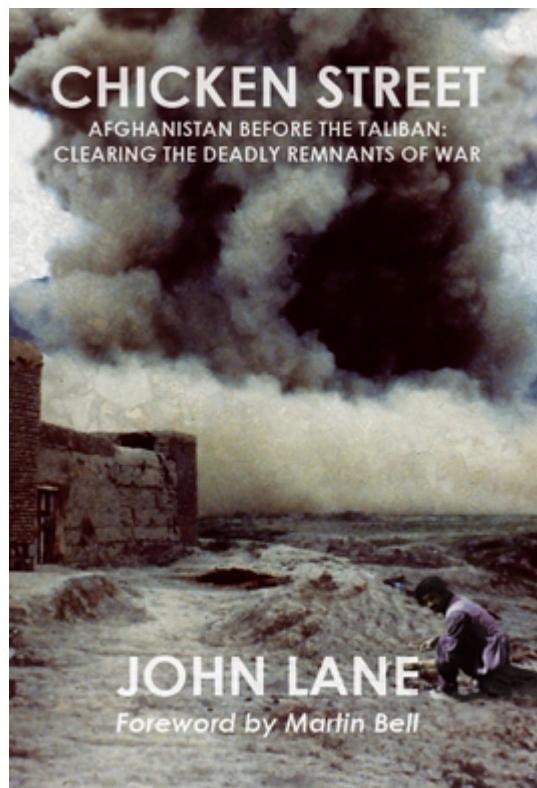
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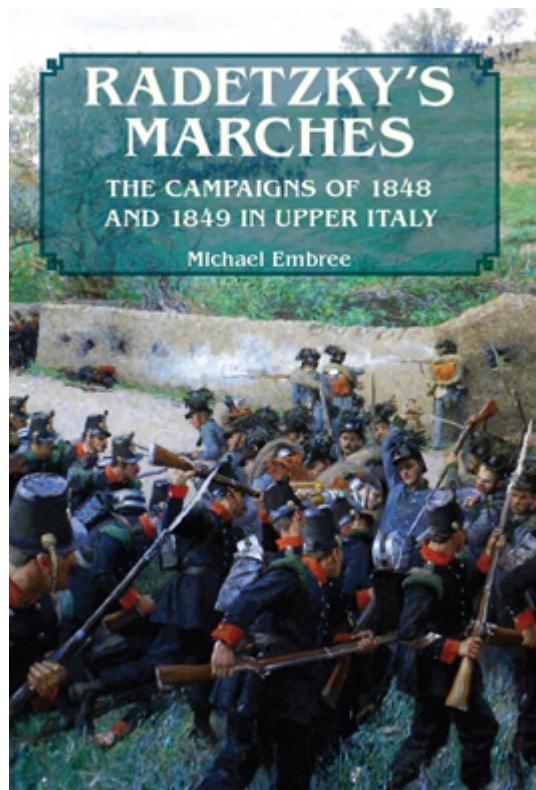
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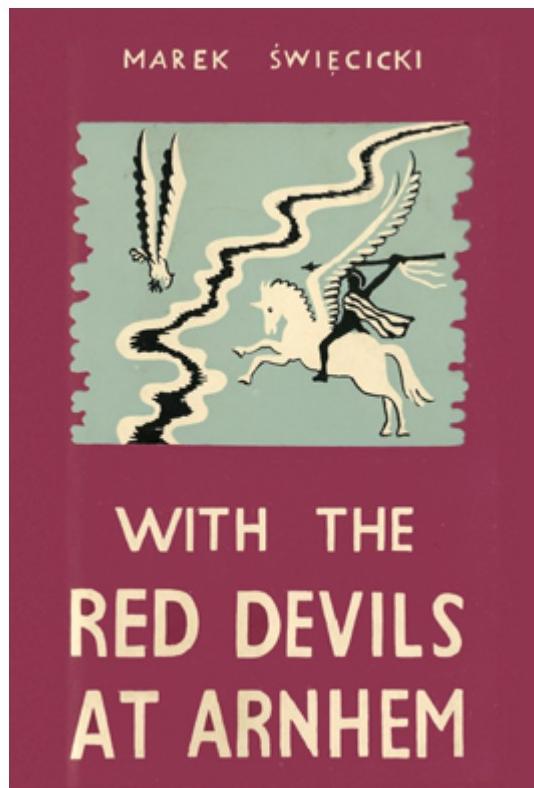
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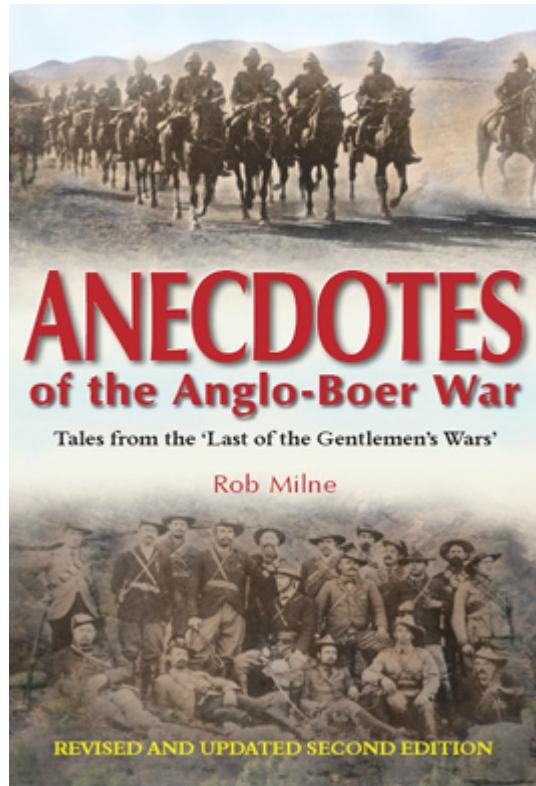


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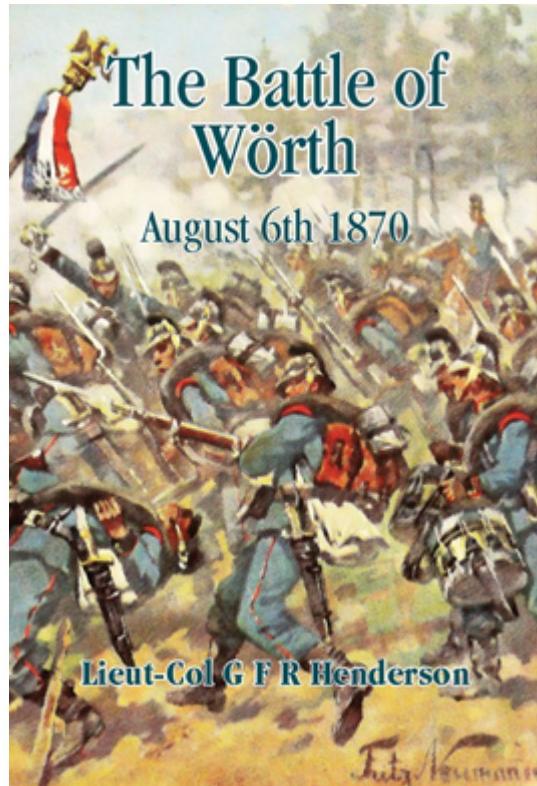
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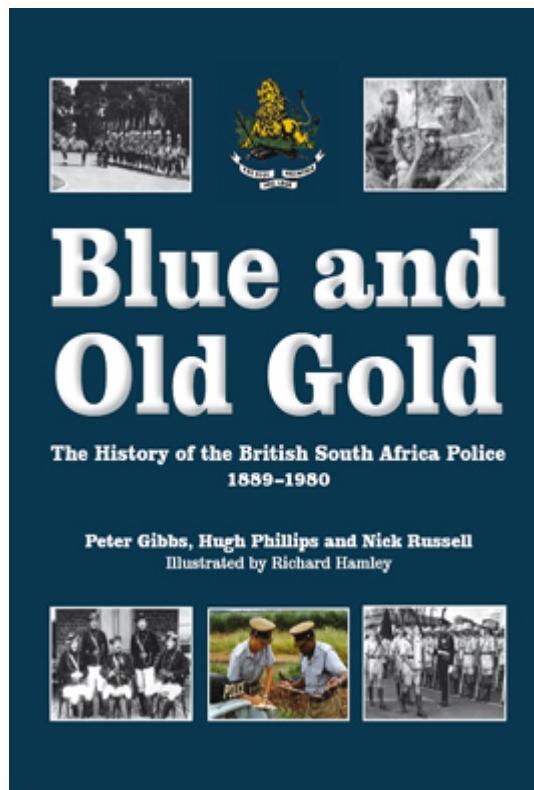
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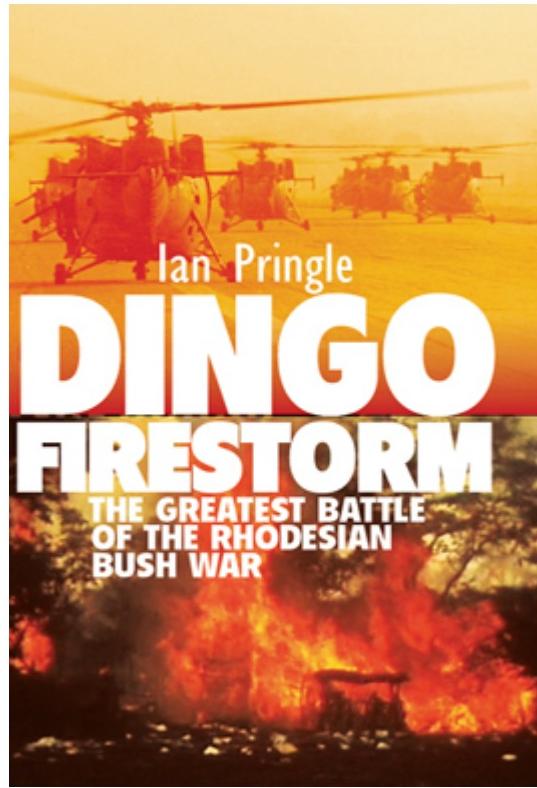


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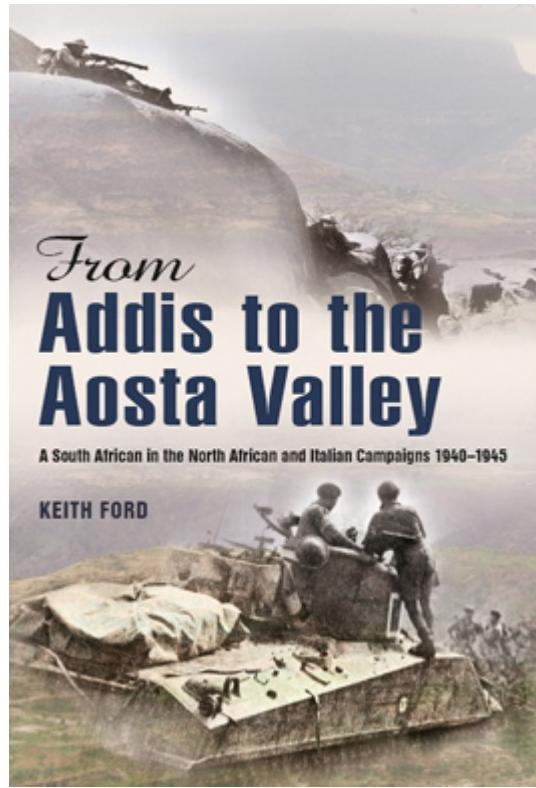


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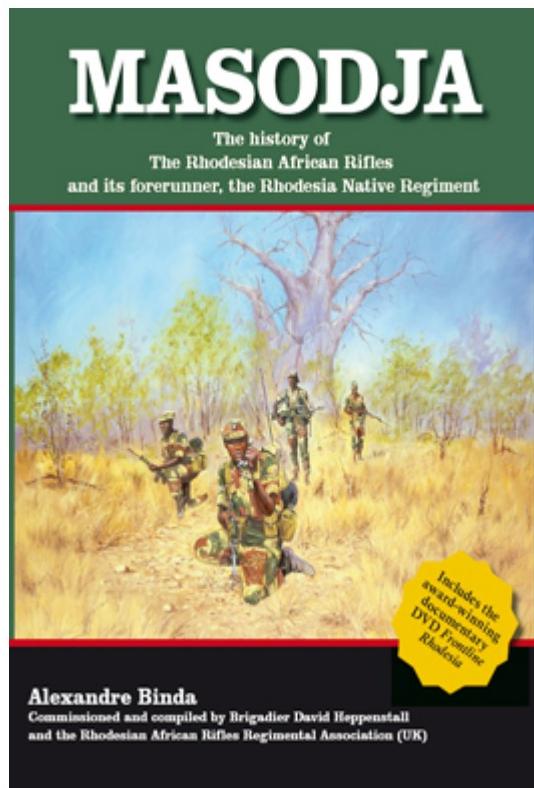
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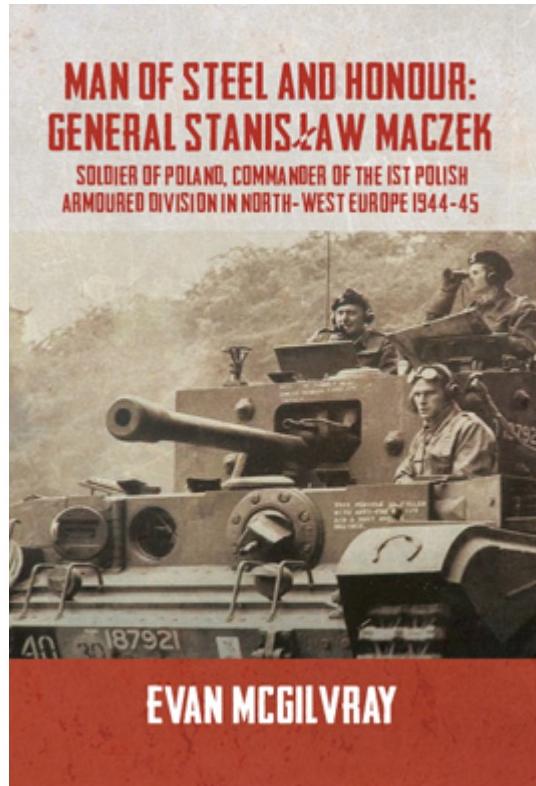
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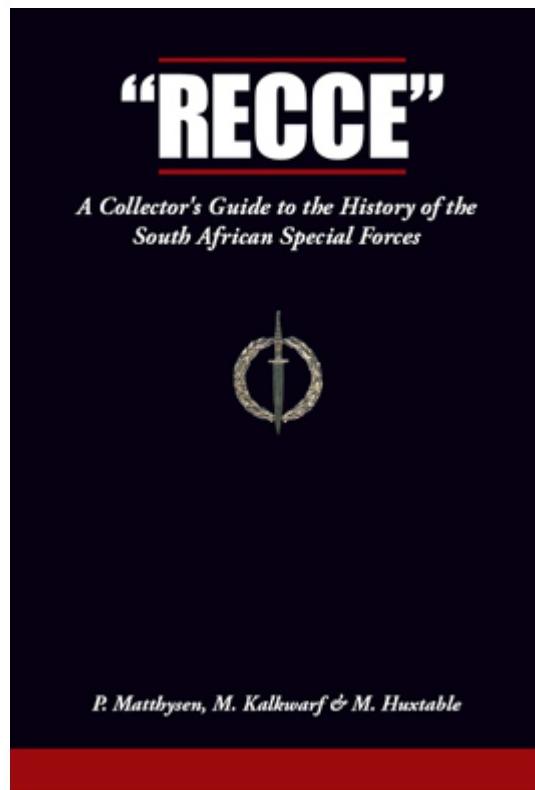


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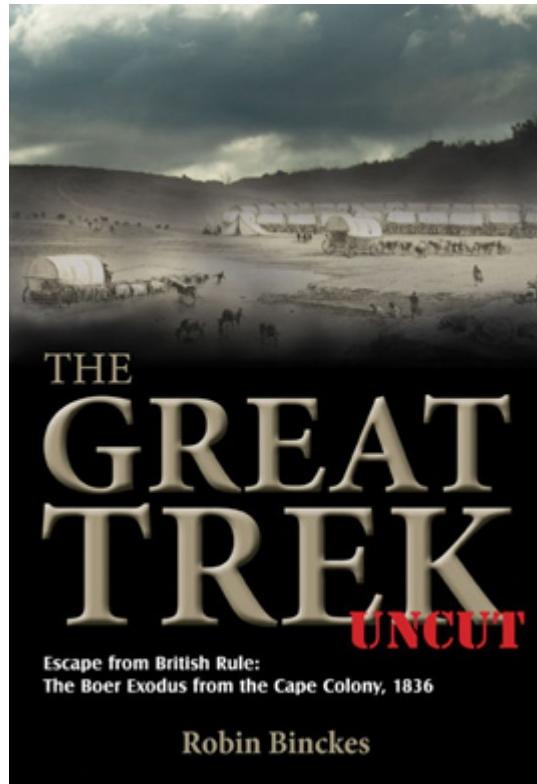
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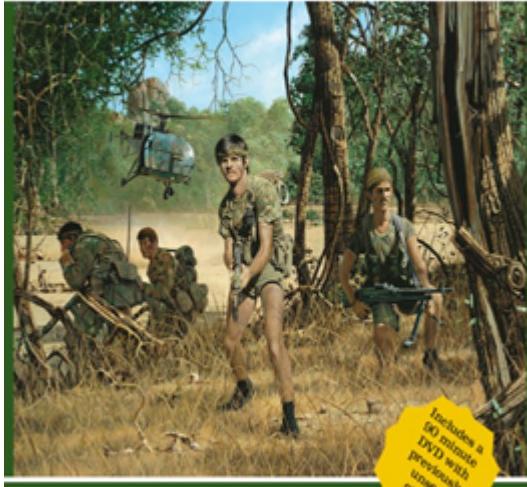
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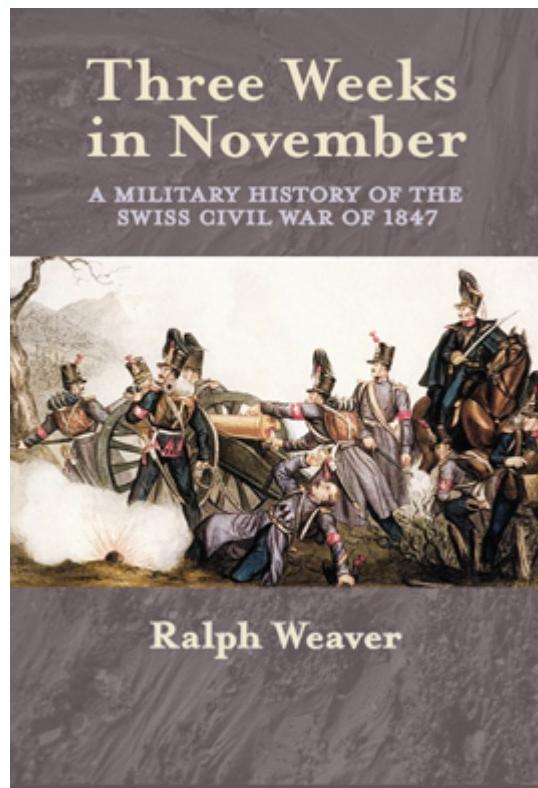
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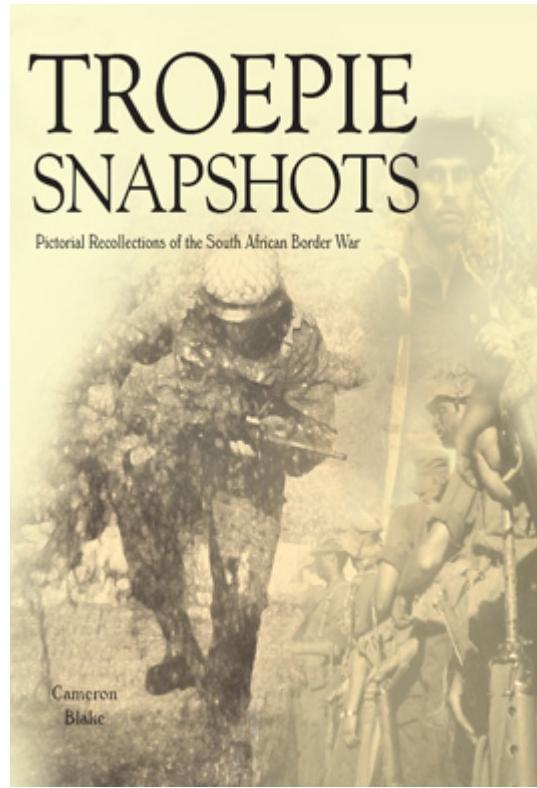
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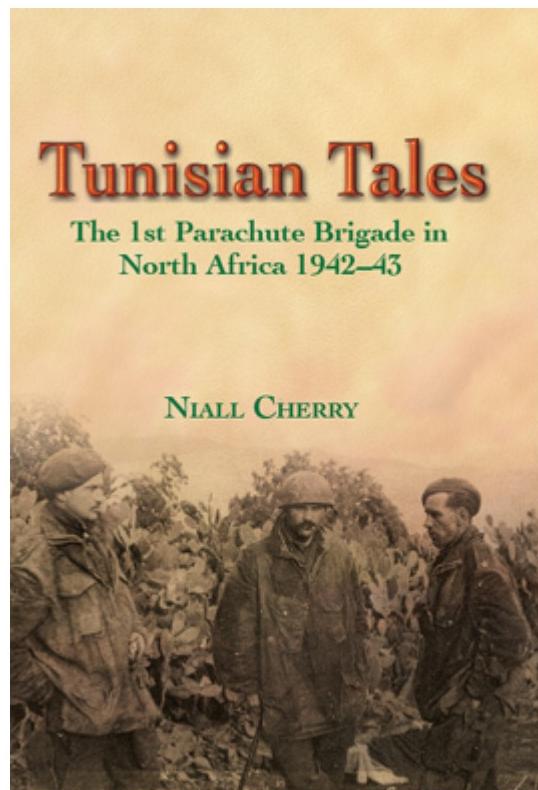
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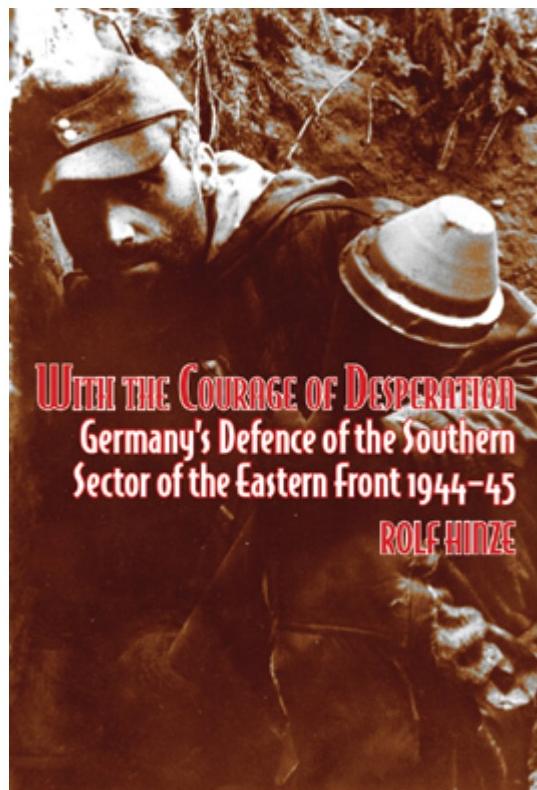
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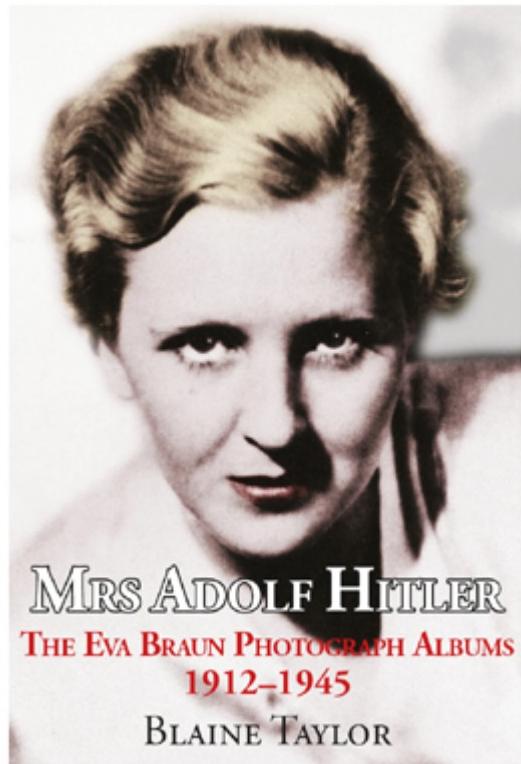
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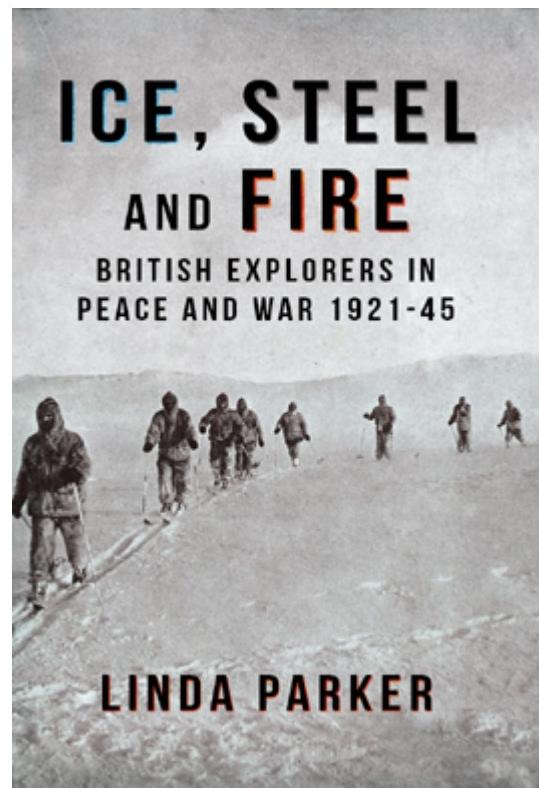
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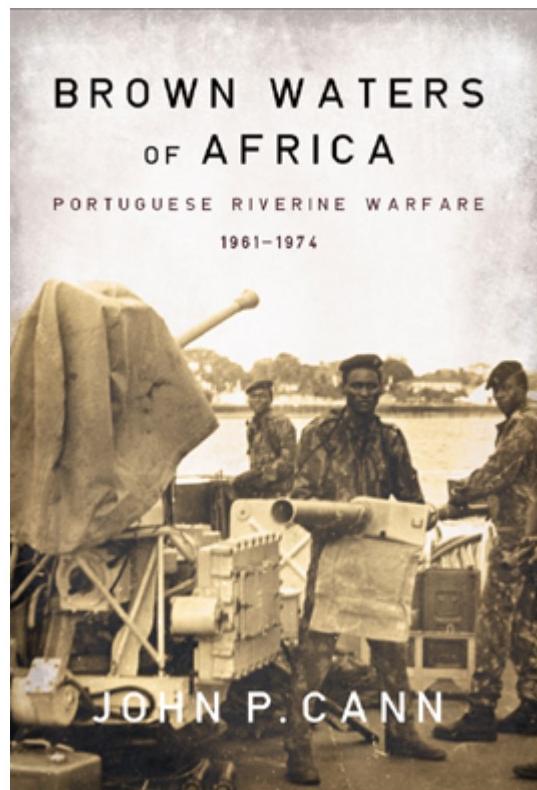
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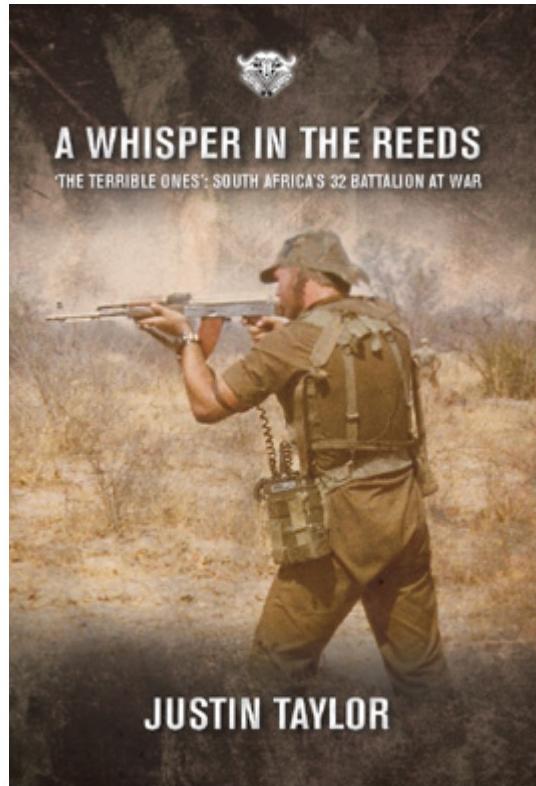
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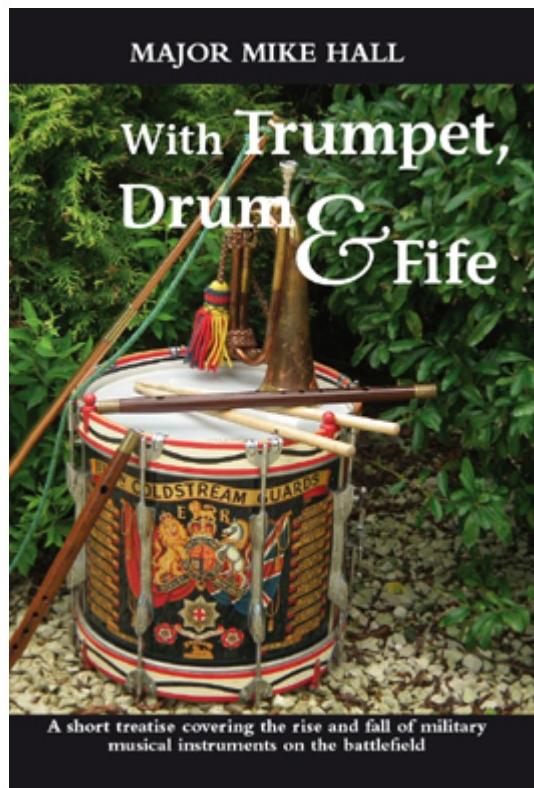
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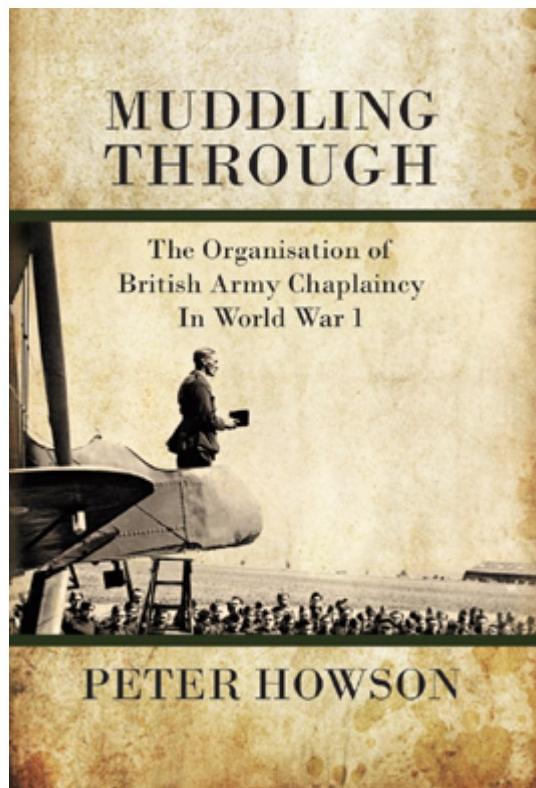
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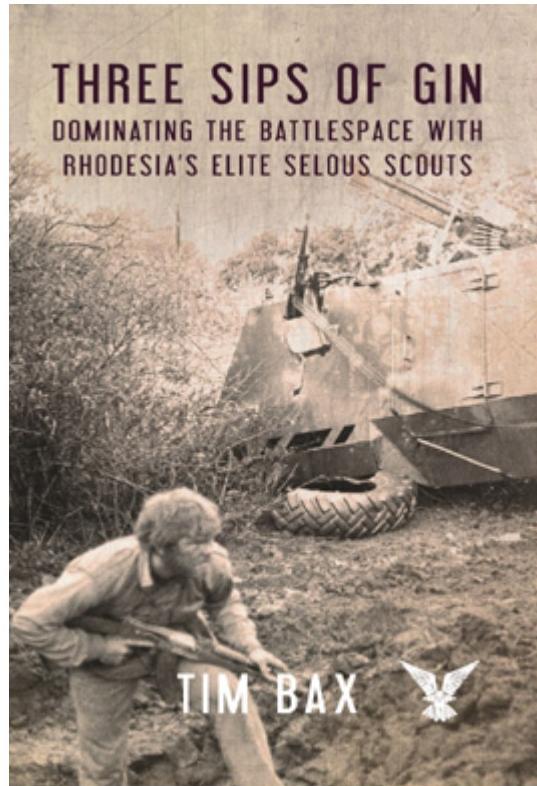
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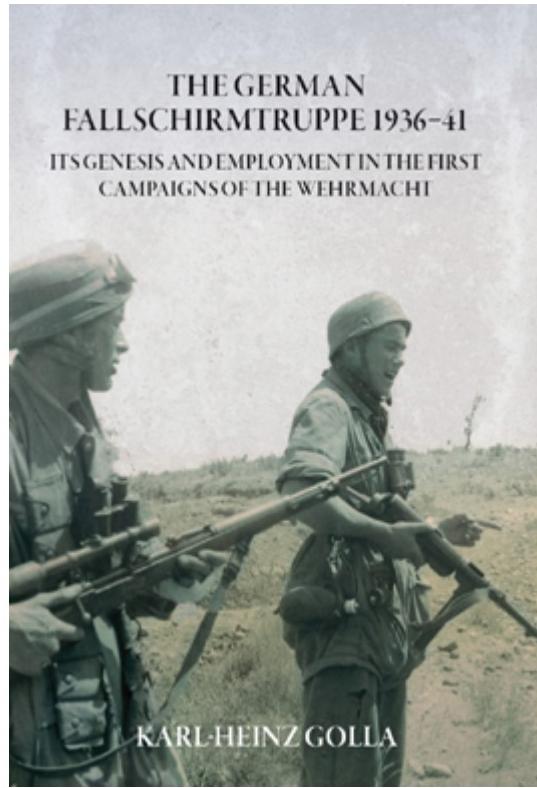
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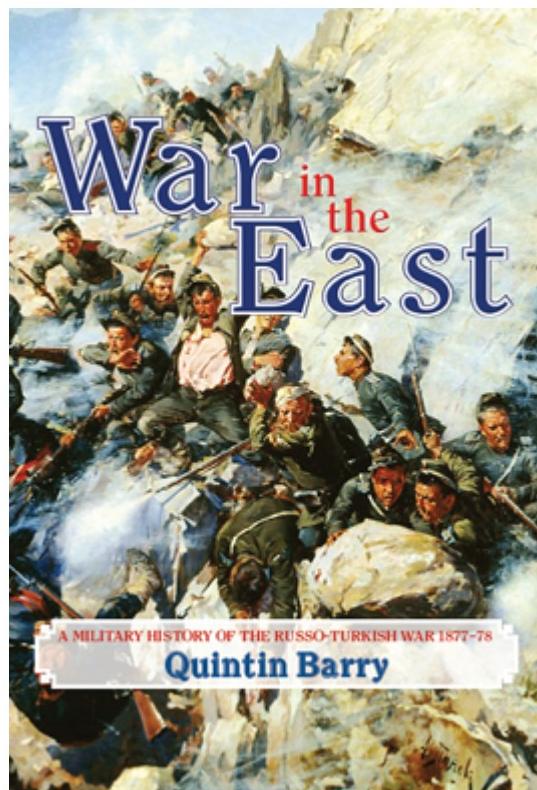
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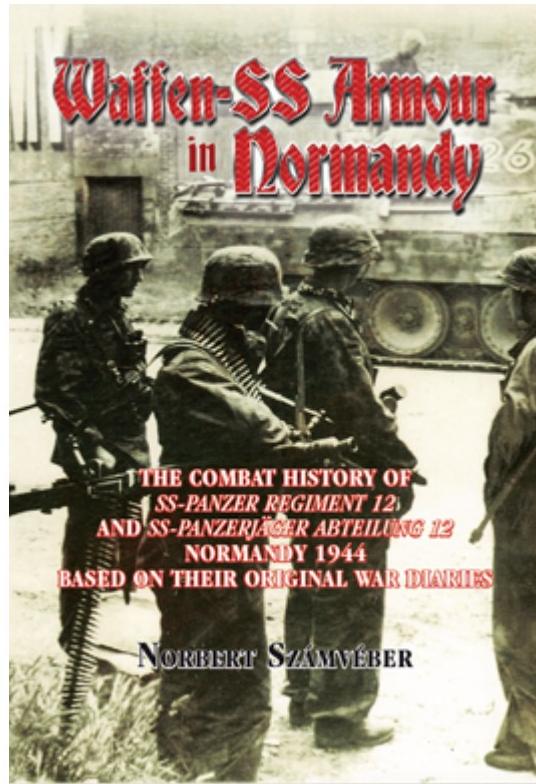
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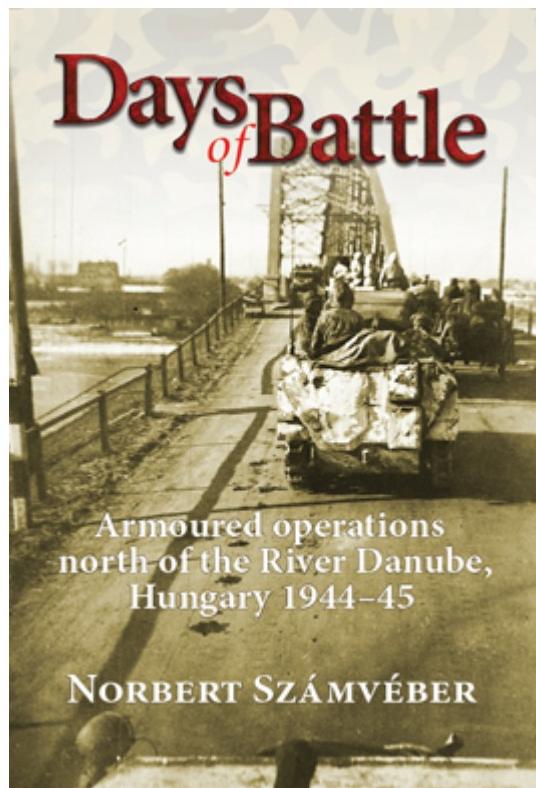
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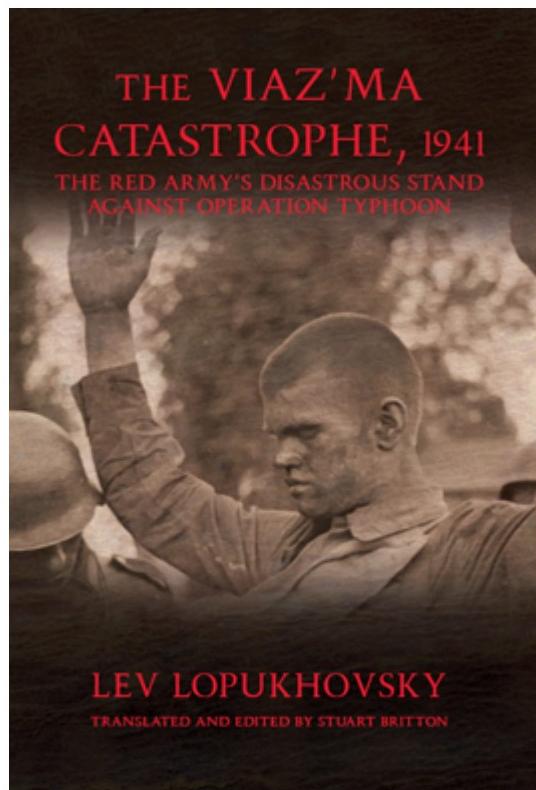
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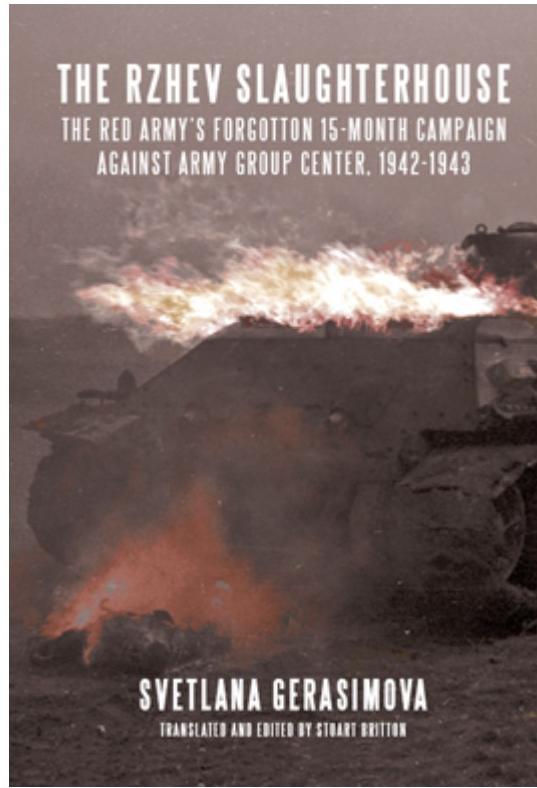


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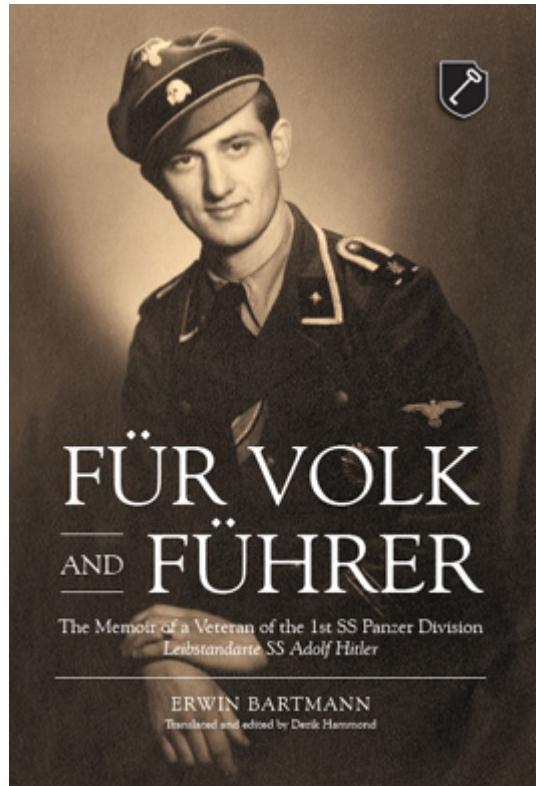
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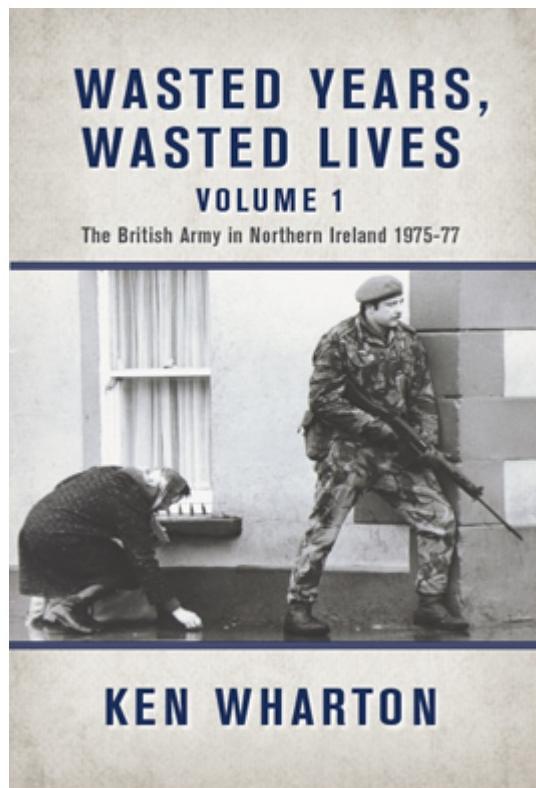
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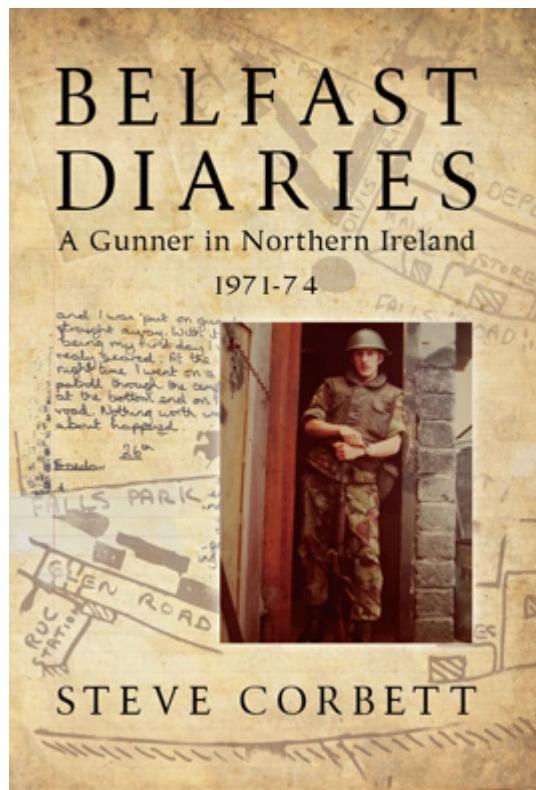
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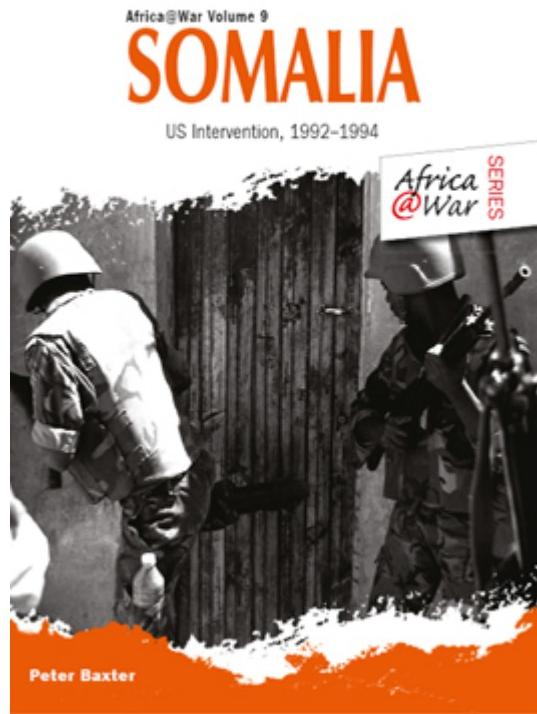
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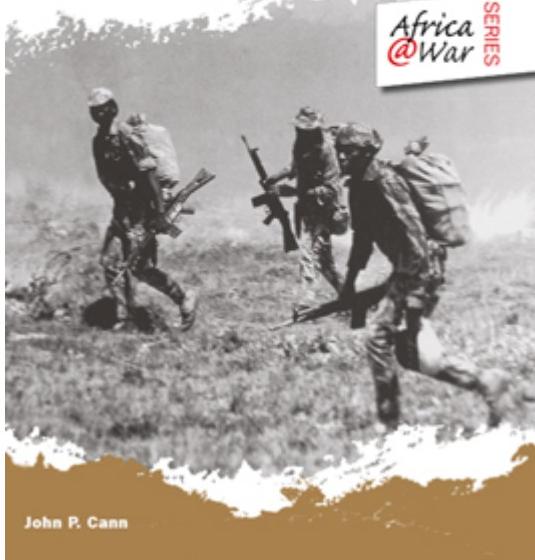
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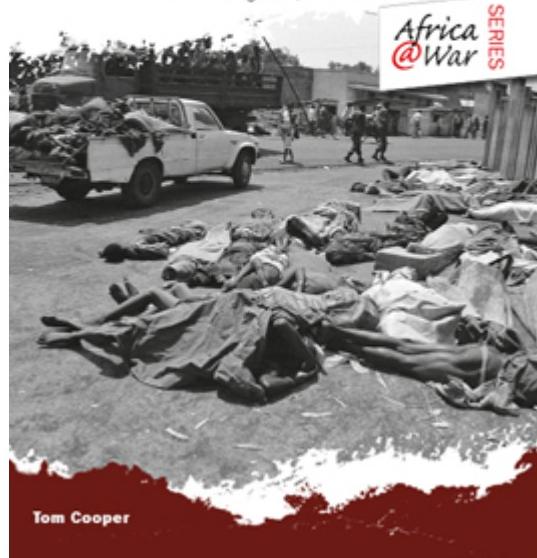
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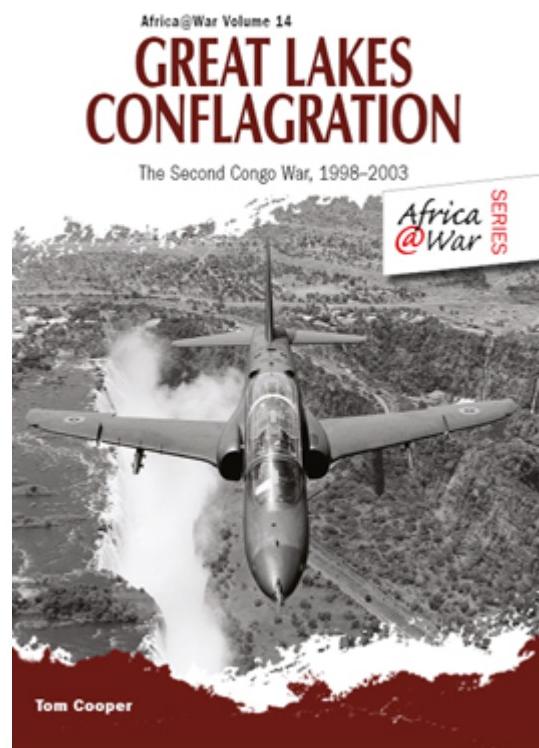
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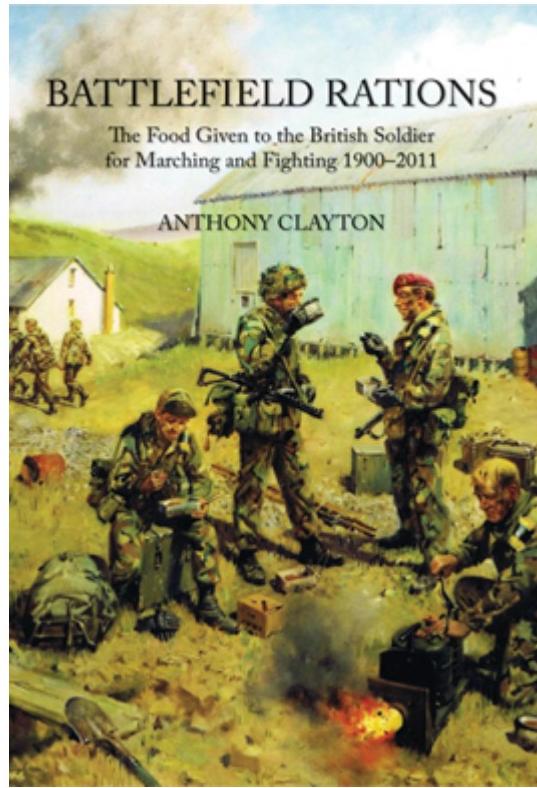
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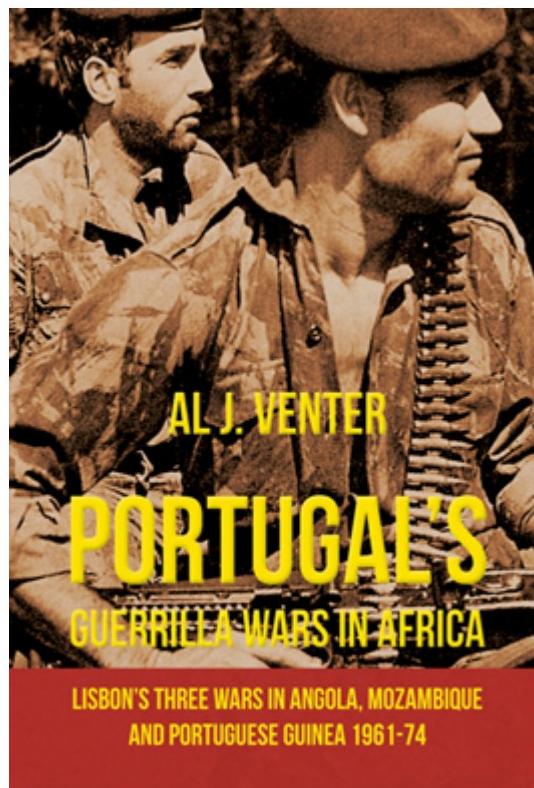


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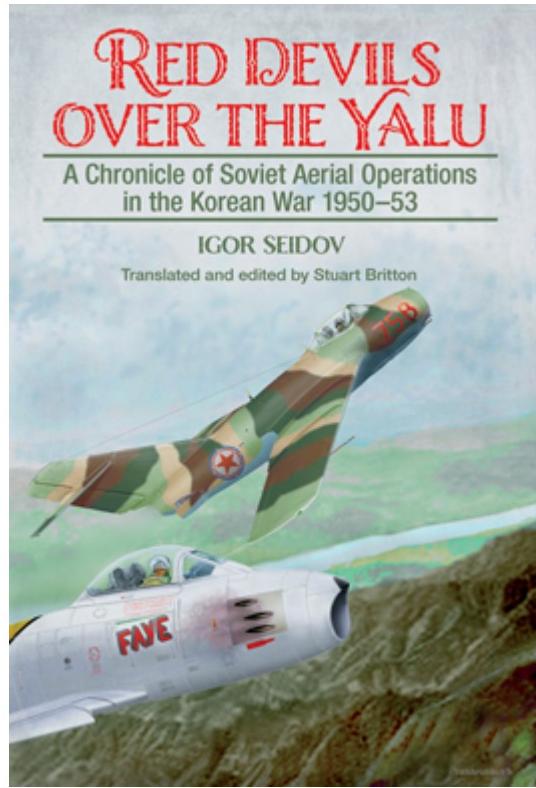
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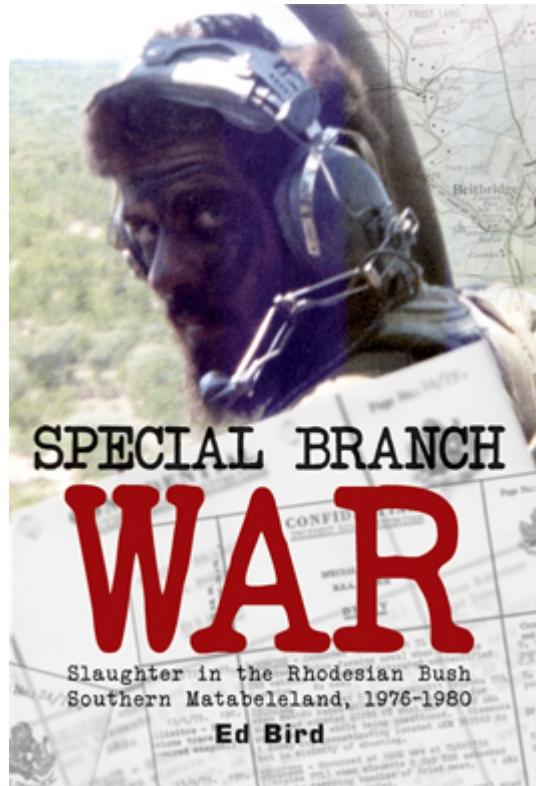
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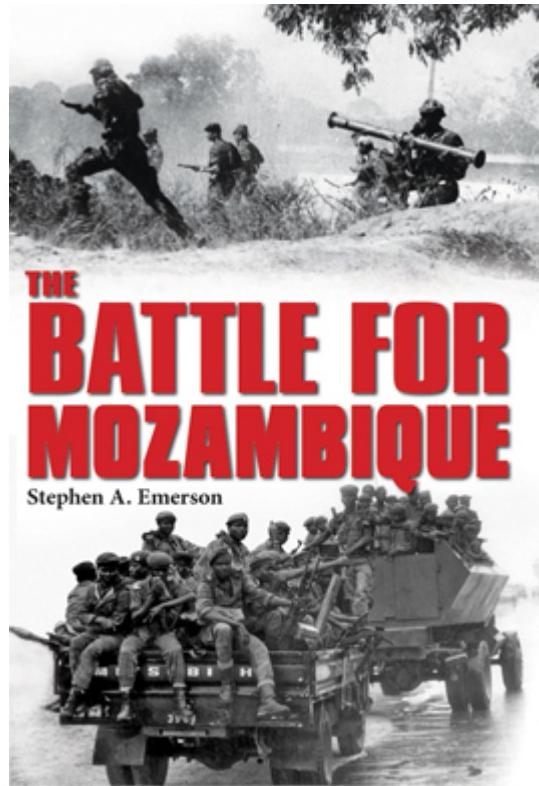
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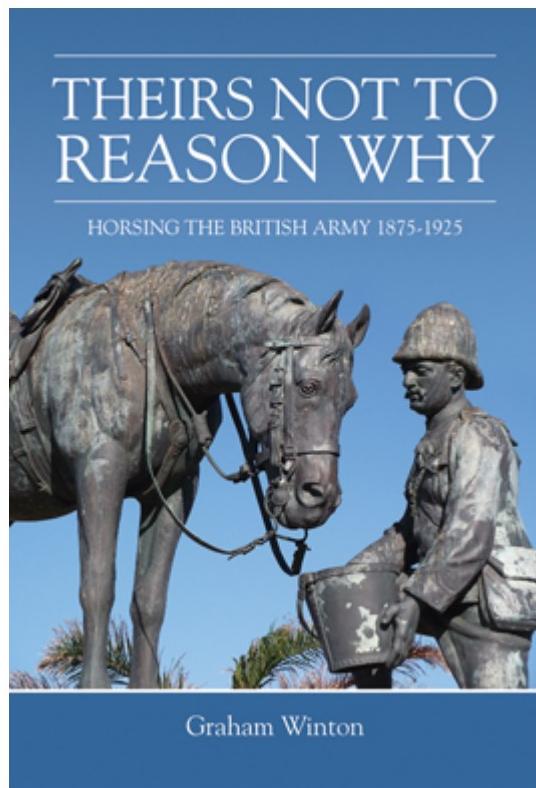
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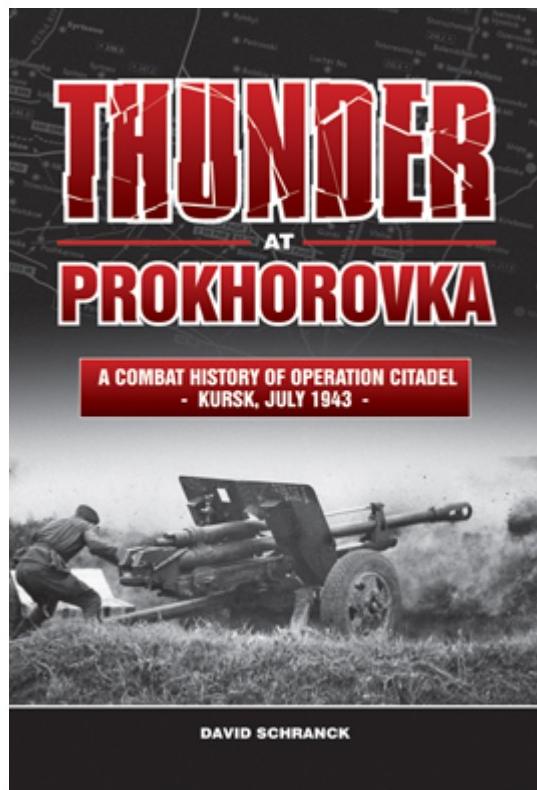


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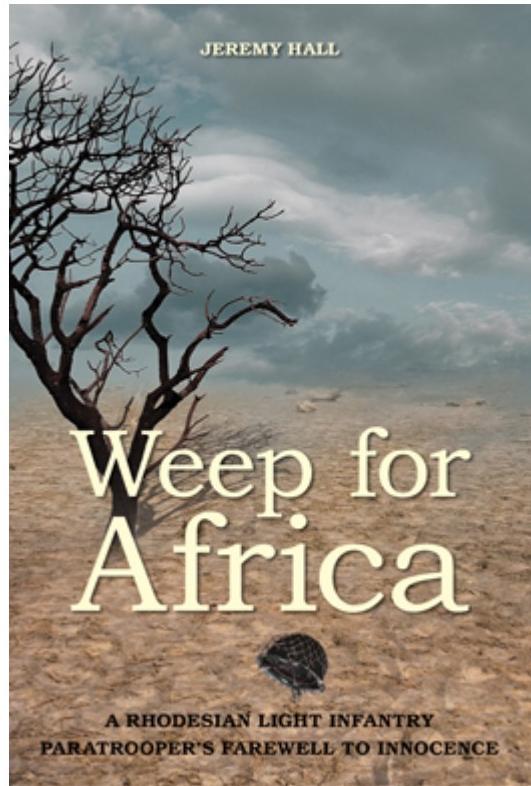
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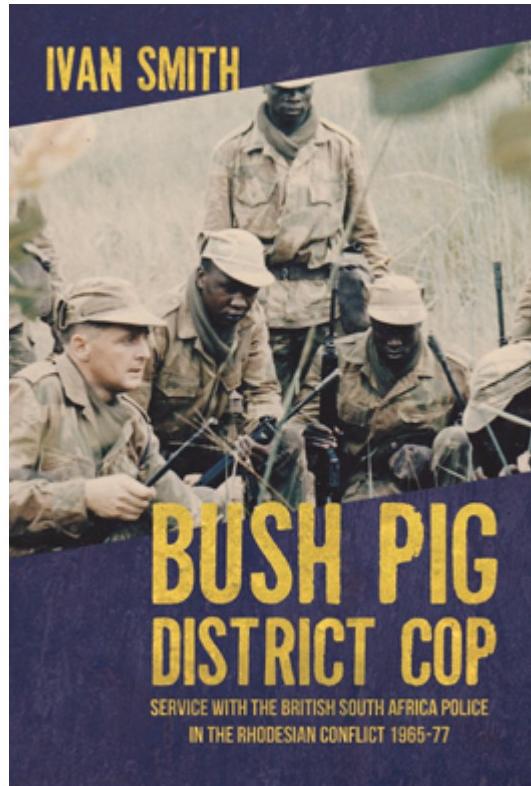
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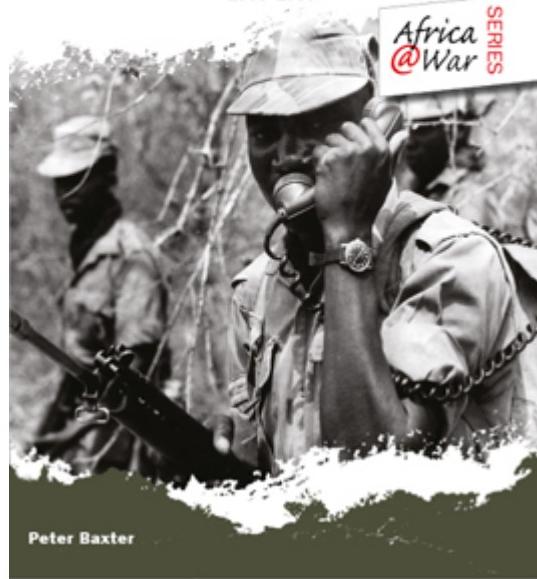
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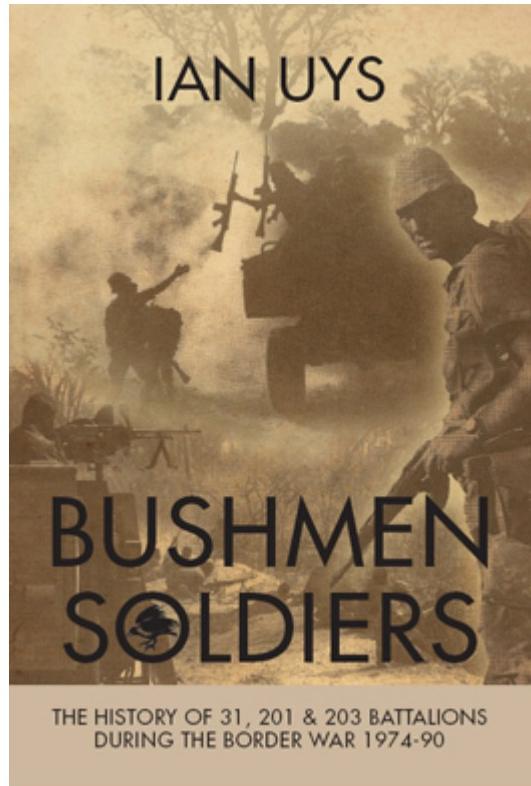


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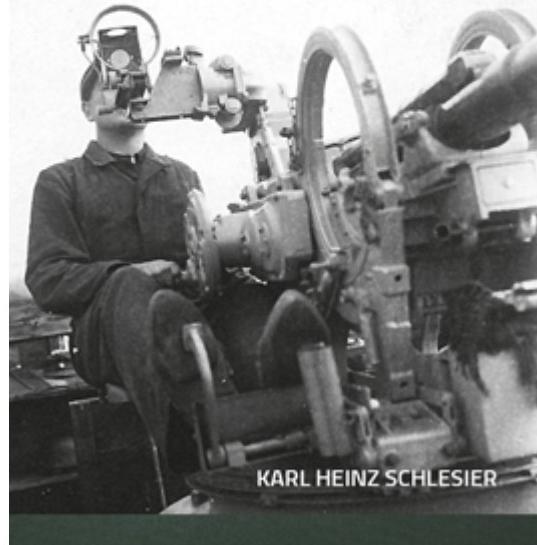


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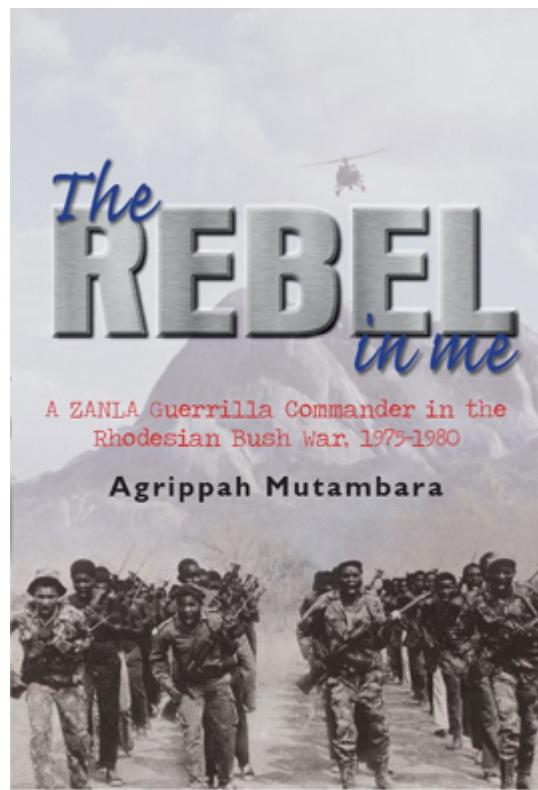
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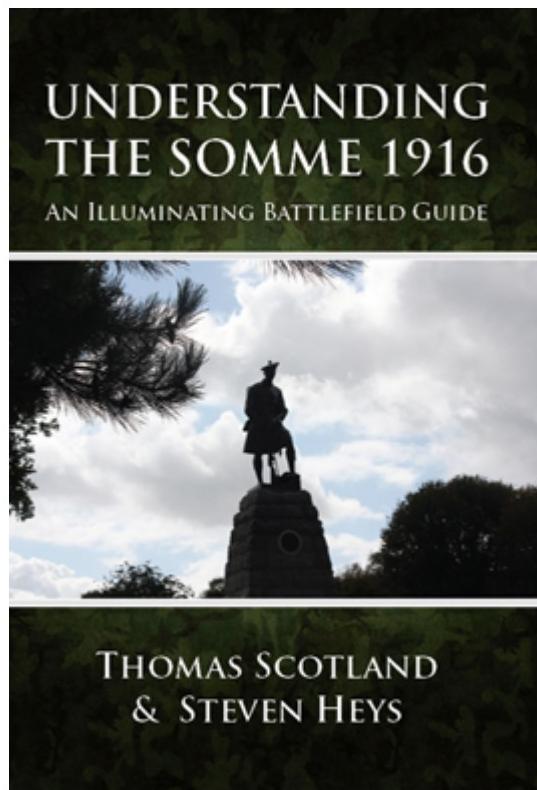
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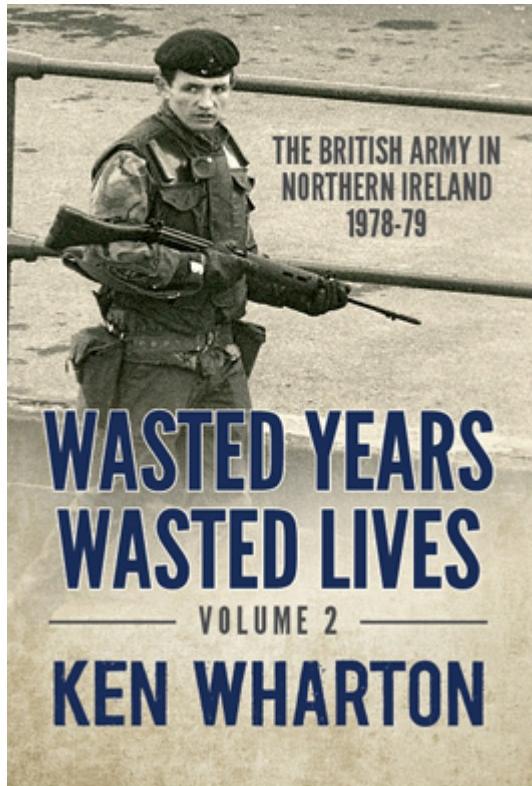
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